**Maneater**

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# Maneater

by RedFive

Summary

COMPLETED: Hannibal and Will are dispatched to a sleepy beach town in south Georgia where a killer shark is terrorizing the citizens. Smelling blood in the water, Hannibal sees an opportunity to draw Will further into his world, but he'll need the right bait to catch the luckless FBI agent.

Notes

Chapters will go up once a week until it's finished. Look for updates on or around Thursdays. Hope you enjoy guys! Special thanks to @wolftrapqueen27 for being my beta!

# The Pig

The pig crashed through the brush consumed by the primordial fear that drives all small prey. She didn't look where she was going because the 'where' didn't matter. She could run and perhaps live or stay and surely die, so a simple mind made a simple decision—she ran.

Tracking her was easy. The trail of destruction she left in her wake would have been easy to follow regardless, but this was not how the beast stalked her. More common creatures could run down their prey in this manner, but not him—no, not him. Her fear was a much more reliable means of tracking her and more savory. Thick and nutty, when poured into his morning coffee the taste should be exquisite. It was something new to try at least and lately, newness had been very much on this predator's mind.

He followed her and moved easily but not soundlessly through the forest; this was intentional. He wanted her to hear him coming, to increase her fear, and drive her towards a predetermined destination. It was not his usual modus operandi. Whenever possible, he was quick with his kills. Too much adrenaline in the body made the meat bitter, but this is was a special occasion. Her fear was the important ingredient here. He wanted her blood thick with it until it ran through his hands like warm molasses. If the taste were half as enchanting as the smell of it, he would be greatly pleased with the resulting cup of coffee. He might even roast the beans on a bed of bone and marrow to enhance the flavor. Yes, a picture was forming, one worth breaking his established patterns for. He had broken with a lot of former habits in recent months. He could not say that he regretted it, but he could he say that he did not either. Too many things were still in play to say anything with certainty, especially now that the FBI was buzzing around his old murders again.

In the meantime, he would continue to hunt, feed, and amuse himself with all that this garden of earthly delights had to offer, and that began with this pig, who was ripe for the slaughter.

Despite a pair of long legs and well-muscled calves, which stretched and pushed themselves to new and desperate limits, it was clear she was no runner. When she was not stumbling into trees or thickets, she ran at a slow and labored pace. Suddenly she screamed and fell forward as she tripped over a log.

He drew to a halt forty feet away and assessed the situation. It would be easy to take her now, but then he would have to carry the body for some distance. The thought made his wounded leg and back tighten; he would have to wait.

The woman sobbed into the dead, brown leaves and did not get up. She wept and prayed to the same God that created polio, genocide and sadists while he waited in the shadows. She should have read the morning paper. She would have known that God had dropped another church on a congregation in Manzaillo last evening: forty-two dead, including a newly christened child. That was the trouble with today's youth; they just did not read anymore.

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When she fell, Christine Watkins thought it was all over. The thirty-two year old Yoga instructor and mother of one lay on the ground sobbing and waiting to die, but when her pursuer did not immediately fall upon her, a glimmer of hope seized her. Had she escaped him? "Okay, I'm okay," she whimpered and wiped the snot and spittle from her mouth as she clambered back onto her feet. Leaves rustled behind her. "Fuck you!" she screamed and turned towards the noise thinking it was him, but it was only the wind ripping through the forest for an instant before it died away.

Her heart beat at Mach two in that terrifying moment. But when the specter of her attacker finally faded, she was alone again in the dark wood. "Okay," she told herself once more gathering her confidence around her like armor. "You are going to be *okay*."

She turned around in a slow circle reorienting herself after the fall. The forest was deathly silent except for the wind in the trees. That seemed like a good sign. Nothing moved in the darkness, and no bats flitted through the air. She really was alone, alone and alive! Against all odds, she had done it! She could do this! She was going to survive! All Christine had to do now was find a place to hide until she could call the police. To do that, she needed to get back to civilization—find a road or something. She started forward again, moving slower this time to avoid mistakes. Her panic gave way to purpose.

But Christine was a city girl and missed what would have been perfectly obvious to any local: the woods are never silent… *except when a large predator is nearby.* It was not the only thing she was ignorant of. What she didn't know; couldn't know; wouldn't *want* to know; was that her final scene had already been written. The beast had sounded on her and now circled his prey preparing for the the kill.

The forest began to thin, and suddenly, a glint of light broke through the underbrush.

Hope and adrenaline flooded her body; she began to run again. As she got closer, she realized the light came from a pair of stationary headlights. Twice she tried to call out to the car, but her weary lungs could only fill themselves halfway.

She erupted through the brush onto open ground and nearly fell on the loose, shifting gravel as she darted for the vehicle. The headlights belonged to a parked, four door sedan. She bumped into the front end and felt her way to the driver's side door while her eyes adjusted to the light.

The car was empty. Maybe they popped out to take a leak? Did it matter? The keys were ignition. She could just take it, but...she could be leaving someone else to die in her place if she did. Oh, hell. Christine had fended for herself long enough. Let someone else take a turn.

The front door was locked so she tried the backdoor, which popped opened easily, but Christine froze when she got a good look at the interior. The seats were folded down, and the trunk bed was covered by a plastic tarp. Now, she knew whose car this was and why it was here.

Her lungs filled with air to scream, but a hand gripped her by the ponytail and bashed her head against the roof of the sedan before she could make a sound.

She fell onto the gravel and saw stars before her eyes, actual stars. She was on her back looking at the black night sky. Dozens of gas giants looked down and bore witness to what was happening. She looked for her attacker too. She wanted to get a good look at the bastard before it happened, but Christine only saw the fist that barreled towards her face. It struck her like a brick, and one by one, the stars winked as she drifted into unconsciousness.

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Christine Watkins opened her eyes only once more—when the pain grew too great to tolerate. She could see her attacker through a veil of salt tears; he insisted on it. If her head rolled weakly to the side, he cupped her chin with gentle hands and turned her face back towards him.

He was a middle-aged man with light hair and angular cheekbones. He smiled at her as he pushed her bangs out of her eyes and wiped the tear tracks off her cheeks. It was an irritating, lopsided smile, like he only cared enough to partially enjoy himself while he killed her.

She gathered her remaining strength and made one final attempt to call for help, but the time for that was over. She'd already spent her last breath and didn't even know it. Her killer held something up for her examination. Christine's eyes widened in surprise even as the light died in them for *he held her lungs in his hands.*

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His phone buzzed while he was still up to his elbows in gore. Hannibal ignored it. The needs of his other life consumed enough of his days already. This was a time of privacy for him, and he felt unwilling to share it with anyone.

The phone buzzed again, and an itch formed on the balls of his fingertips. He removed the remaining organs he needed from the body and packed them away.

Hannibal stood over the corpse and considered it with a severe frown. Letting the girl run away had not been part of the original plan. No, she had escaped all on her own, using his weakened state to her advantage. This should have annoyed him; however, the resulting chase had actually been quite pleasurable. Certainly that called for some revision to his original designs for the body. She deserved that much. While tracking her, he had forgotten about the aches and bruises he'd received from Tobias. She had made him feel like a younger man tonight. Tobias had too, actually (in the heat of the moment), but the afterglow of that fight had not been nearly as pleasant. Maybe a throwback to his youth was in order? A tableau from the late Renaissance perhaps?

Before he could decide on an artistic direction, his phone buzzed for a third time, which settled it. There was only one person in his life who was this demanding.

"Your timing is most inconsiderate, Will," Hannibal hissed although Will was miles away and oblivious to any inconvenience he had caused.

Hannibal moved quickly to clean up the area and rolled the body up in the tarp. "Such a waste," he grumbled as he went about his business. He'd have to dump the corpse in a tank

and dissolve it in acid for quick disposal. The task would not be difficult to manage. He had a safe house on route to Baltimore, but it was a boring end to an otherwise enjoyable evening. However, if Will was having some emergency tonight, Hannibal wanted to be close at hand to control it.

When the crime scene was clear and his hands were their normal shade of pink, he reached for his phone.

*Will: Hannibal*

*Will: Pack your bags. We're going to the beach.*

*Will: Got a problem with that, take it up with Jack.*

The beach? Hannibal read the texts three times and smiled. “The Lord giveth as much as he taketh away. What trouble have you brought to my doorstep this time, my good Will?”

# To Give A Man A Fish

Chapter Summary

> Will can't believe what he's hearing. Has Jack lost his mind or is he just trying to get rid of him? You can't profile a shark!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**EARLIER**

"Jack, you *can't* be serious. You want me to profile a shark?"

"Oh, *want* is the wrong word. I'm *telling* you to do it," Jack said as he gathered a pile of papers into a blue FBI folder and prepared to leave for the day.

"This is ridiculous."

Jack struck the table with the knuckles of his left hand. "You should be happy, Will. I thought you were a fisherman. This is the catch of a lifetime!"

"Trout and catfish, Jack. You're dealing with a great white," Will said from the doorway. He stood in a wide stance with his arms crossed in front of his chest. It was a new look for him, this authoritative posturing, and he wore it like an ill-fitting suit.

"We don't know that."

"It has to be a great white. That's the only fish big enough to do what you described. There is nothing else large enough to cause that kind of carnage."

Jack slipped the blue folder into his briefcase and waved his hand through air in dismissal. "Look at that, you've got this case half-solved already. Now get the hell out of my office, and go find me that fish!" he said shouting now.

"Some of us would be happy to go!" Beverly called from the hallway.

"See! Send Bev! Forensics would be better at this anyway. They can examine water samples and calculate the drift patterns of the bodies to hone in on the shark's hunting grounds."

"Ms. Katz has other assignments, and if she doesn't want to end up logging phones into evidence with the boys in the Locker, she'll remember that," Jack said in a raised his voice so Beverly could hear him.

"Send Price. Hell, send Zeller. Even *he* can do this job."

Someone snickered outside the door. It sounded like Price this time. Was his entire staff listening at the keyhole? Some days it felt like Jack was the director of a very expensive kindergarten instead of the Behavioral Sciences division of the FBI. Will must have kicked-up quite a bluster on his way to Jack's office to draw all this attention. In retrospect, Jack realized that he should have broken the news to Will in person instead of by text; however, even in his worst case scenario, Jack hadn't counted on this much resistance. Hadn't Will just been threatening to quit not too long ago? This was the kind of break he needed, an all expenses paid fishing trip, but Will Graham's mind worked in ways that no one understood. It was easy to forget that. He had changed so much since Jack had approached him to work on the Hobbs case. Many of those changes were positive, *but not all.*

"Believe me, it's been tried. Nothing works. There's a private bounty on this shark that's up to a million dollars already. We've got every fisherman out there with a dingy looking for the thing, and they've all failed."

"But it's impossible!"

"It's done. Go home and pack. I'll have a car pick you up tomorrow to take you to the airport," he said and shouldered Will out of his way as he exited the office.

Will's lean body bounced off the doorframe, and he resumed his pursuit.

"It's a fish, Jack. Its kills aren't premeditated. There's no motive, and nothing for me to analyze. I'm not of any use to you out there!"

Jack was already two hours late getting home to Bella, and he certainly wasn't going to let another one of Will Graham's overreactions get in the way of his prompt exit. He lengthened his stride, which kept Will solidly in his tailwind. "See, that's funny because here I thought I was the director of this agency. I decide what's useful to me. Not you! You're going to Georgia! That's the end of it."

"But...but, the Muppet case. I could help with that."

"Bev's got it," Jack snapped.

"Jack, I--Jack, please. ***Please!*** "

They were at the elevator when Jack's patience finally gave out. "Dammit, Will! You just don't get it, do you? You work for *me*. You go where I tell you to go. You work the cases I tell you to work. In this building, my word is holier than the Ten Commandments!"

There was a loud '*ding'* as the elevator door slid open. "Oh...wrong floor, heh." Alana said assessing the situation in an instant. There was a nervous rattle in her voice that indicated she knew exactly what kind of party she had walked in on.

"Goodnight, Will," Jack said, but Will followed him into the elevator.

"Jack wants to send me after that killer shark," Will volunteered, but the teeth were gone from his voice and posture and replaced by the unsure twitchiness Jack was used to.

"You aren't sending him alone?" she asked Jack.

"Yes." "No!" Jack and Will said in unison.

Alana looked at both men in confusion. "You aren't going alone?" she asked Will directly.

"No, I'm not going alone because I'm not going."

Jack rolled his eyes at the childish comeback. "I think Doctor Bloom makes an excellent point. Take Doctor Lecter with you."

"Jack! No! You can't ask him to get involved! He was just attacked for Christ's sake! Attacked because an FBI investigation brought a madman to his door," Will spat.

"This isn't a madman, Will. It's a shark," Alana said serenely. "Hannibal will be fine."

"He is not fine," Will insisted. "He was almost killed! God, Alana, I thought you were his friend."

Jack raised an eyebrow. If Will was yelling at Alana now, he was most definitely in need of a vacation.

"I ***am*** his friend, and Hannibal is your friend too. He would want to help."

"I'm not helpless," Will muttered and shoved his hands into his pockets.

Alana stepped towards him and placed a hand on his arm. "Nobody thinks you're helpless. Just ask him, Will. Let Hannibal decide."

Will stared at the space above Alana's shoulder. He never even tried to make eye contact. That boy…

The elevator arrived at the lobby. Will shook Alana off and exited the cab curtly. "If he says no, it's your problem, Jack," and then he was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27!

And yes, the muppet in "Muppet Case" refers to those muppets. Maybe one day I'll go back and write that story too, hehe.

Thanks for reading! I hope you'll come visit me on Tumblr.

# What Are You Afraid Of?

Chapter Summary

On their way to Georgia, Will and Hannibal stop for lunch, and a particular door begins to rattle in the darker corridors of Hannibal's mind palace.

Chapter Notes

And finally! The boys are back in the same shot again. Enjoy!

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27.

Will was asleep in the passenger seat thrashing as much as his seatbelt would allow. These outbursts never lasted long so Hannibal didn't see any reason to intercede. Will was simply in that semiconscious state where dreams changed rapidly, and whatever was troubling him would soon pass. Hannibal did not worry about nightmares. Will Graham was no stranger to them, and some dreams were beneficial to his treatment. No, what Hannibal worried about were the bags under his eyes, the loss of weight, and that sickly, sweet smell he gave off, like cyanide and ripe tomatoes. Fitful or not, sleep was still sleep so Hannibal let him be.

But this most recent fit had gone on just long enough to make Hannibal uncomfortable. He was about to reach across the console and shake Will awake when his companion began to speak.

"Swine," Will snarled. His upper lip curled over his teeth in a beautiful display of hatred. Hannibal relaxed and forced his eyes back onto the road. Wherever his patient was right now perhaps it was better that he stayed there a little longer.

Eventually, Will quieted and an awful stillness invaded their space. It was not the first time it had happened during this roadtrip, not even the tenth. Hannibal dreaded these regular silences, which left him with too much time to think and too few distractions. The unending problem of *'what to do with Will Graham'* was becoming increasingly bothersome. Hannibal knew only what he did not want to do: *he did not want to lose him.* Will's friendship had become one of the true pleasures in Hannibal's life, but it seemed inevitable that lose him he would.

Three things were possible. First, Hannibal could reveal what he suspected about Will's health and the unusual behavior he was presenting with lately, but this was not in Hannibal's own best interests. If Will recovered now, it would not be long before he made the

connections that would bring the FBI to Hannibal's doorstep with less than friendly intentions. However, Hannibal might also lose Will to madness and disease by waiting too long to seek medical intervention. Hopefully, it wouldn't come to either of those outcomes because soon, Will would begin to see things... *differently* .

His plans were already in motion, but Will was a stubborn man. Ordinarily, that stubbornness would earn him an invitation to Hannibal's next dinner party as a "special guest." But when he was not fighting Hannibal, when Will was quiet and sweet, he listened and understood in a manner that made Hannibal want to forgive him everything. Hannibal had plenty of people to listen to him. It was one of the perks of being both charismatic and rich, but Will was different than the rest of the sycophants. He listened with his whole body and internalized every conversation, which allowed him to understand people with astounding clarity. In the entire world, Hannibal had never met anyone like him.

*Yes, Will Graham was important.*

Hannibal slammed his foot on the brake and quickly pulled over to the side of the road.

The sudden jolt woke Will, who rose from his slumber howling and spitting at the world. "Jesus Christ! What the hell was that!?! Were you trying to snap my head off," he shouted and rubbed the thick, red mark forming on his neck where his seatbelt had lain.

Hannibal was not really listening to his passenger's complaints. He was much more interested in the peculiar sound his heart was making, pumping two beats too fast. "My apologies. I thought I saw a deer."

"Yeah, well, join the club," Will groused.

"Pardon me?"

"Forget it. Are you okay?"

Hannibal took a moment to compose himself so what he said next would not be a lie. Will could easily spot a lie on most people. It was one of the reasons Hannibal found their friendship so stimulating. Will kept him on his toes—always watchful and under the threat of discovery. Only one other thing entertained Hannibal more than this cat-and-mouse game he played with his favorite FBI agent, and the two were not unrelated. "I'm fine. Thank you," he said at last.

Will looked at him suspiciously before turning his attention to the road. "Hey, look! There's a rest stop five miles away," he said and pointed to a blue sign on the highway. "Let's get off the road and take a break until I'm sure you're ready to drive again.

Hannibal acquiesced, pleased that Will was not trying to take the wheel from him anymore. Yesterday, they had argued about that point for over an hour after they landed in Atlanta. Since the car was government property on loan from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Will felt obligated to do the driving as a result of his misplaced attachment to duty, liabilities, and procedure. It was nonsense. *Will Graham was a liability* in his increasingly unstable state. Honestly, Jack should have known better. What had he been thinking, sending Will

alone on an assignment like this? It was irresponsible. Well...Hannibal was glad that wiser heads had prevailed and sent him along with the young profiler. He would punish Jack Crawford later for his insensitivity.

Hannibal had only won their duel by turning Will's honesty against him. Between his two jobs, the insomnia, and his nightmares there was little chance Will had gotten much rest lately. When called upon to admit exactly how many hours of sleep he had managed in the last three days, Will had thrown the keys at Hannibal's head instead. Since they had wasted most of the afternoon securing a car, they spent the night in Atlanta and struck out in the morning.

As soon as the car came to a stop, Will was up and out the door before the engine was off.

"Ahh," he sighed and stretched his arms above his head while Hannibal watched discreetly.

When Will turned back around, Hannibal was already climbing out of the car and buttoning up his jacket. "See if there is a vending machine nearby and buy us some water. I'll set out some lunch."

"Sure. Grab a picnic table while I'm gone." Will said trotted off to parts unknown allowing Hannibal the privacy to stretch as well.

There were plenty of tables to choose from since there were only two other cars in the lot. Hannibal chose the one that looked the least rotted and spread a paisley tablecloth over the sun bleached wood. He went back to the car and returned with containers of food and two sets of chrome-finished, plastic utensils, which bore a striking resemblance to the real thing.

On Will's return, one of his eyebrows disappeared beneath his unruly mop of curls when he saw the table setting. "Is that silver?" he asked nodding at the fork and knife. "Please tell me it isn't."

Hannibal picked up a fork and flicked it. The sound didn't ring like metal would. "Will that do? There is real silver in the trunk if you'd prefer."

It took five solid seconds before Will began to laugh. "Okay, for a moment I thought--"

"Will," Hannibal huffed feeling none too pleased that Will believed he could actually be that pretentious. "Sit and eat. Your food is getting cold," he ordered.

His dining partner plopped down onto the nearest bench. "Here. It's bottled water, but the kind that comes from the tap. I hope that's okay," he said and passed one bottle across the table.

"That will do just fine, thank you," Hannibal replied taking great effort not to grind his teeth.

"Good, I'm glad," but when Will opened his container of food that gladness fell away from his face. Hannibal watched his eyes glaze over and his mind retreat to some distant memory.

"This is a protein scramble," Will said.

Hannibal shifted on the bench suddenly nervous. "It is indeed. Is that a problem?"

Will shook his head, but Hannibal knew the gesture was not meant as a reply to their conversation. He shook his head to clear his vision and separate the two timelines so he could put them back in their proper places. "It's fine. I just remembered that this was the first meal we shared."

*Ahah. So that's where you went, my little mongoose.* It pleased Hannibal to know that Will remembered. "Well, you enjoyed it so much the first time. I thought--"

"I hated you the first time," Will cut him off.

Now it was Hannibal's turn to awkwardly search for the humor in Will's words. "And now?" he asked hoping that he did not sound as pathetic as he thought he might.

"I don't hate you."

Hannibal barked a laugh and raised his bottle. *Difficult boy.* They had come such a long way together. Hannibal considered Will his friend, but he was not always sure how much that friendship was reciprocated. Will had become very open in therapy, but continued to keep Hannibal at a distance in informal settings and in the company of others. Well, it was enough for now. Will would come around eventually. "To new beginnings. We will rejoice and be glad of the day the Lord hath made."

Will returned the toast. "You know it's bad luck to toast with water," he said before taking a large gulp anyway.

"Do you believe in luck, Will?"

"Depends on the day," he said and stuffed a large bite of egg into his mouth. "Mmmm, how did you manage this," he asked while masticating on his food like an ill-mannered hyena.

Hannibal leaned forward conspiratorially, "I sweet talked the hotel staff into letting me use their kitchen this morning."

"You brought sausage with you all the way from Baltimore?"

"One of the junior chefs was kind enough to loan me some ingredients," Hannibal said smiling at his own joke. This was the same chef who had sent out a second sub-par steak after Hannibal had already sent his plate back once already.

"You could charm your way out of hell couldn't you?"

"We shall see," Hannibal said lifting his eyes to God. "But I will worry about that on Judgement Day when the wrath of the lamb comes for me. My greater concern is for the here and now and the happiness of those individuals who have chosen to come along for the ride. I notice your spirits have risen. Am I forgiven then for nearly killing us both?"

"Huh? Oh yeah, sure. There's only so much fight in me I suppose," Will sighed.

*Oh, how wrong you are,* Hannibal thought. *You are a warrior, Will. If only you understood yourself as I understand you.*

"Do you know sharks don't float?" Will said not just changing direction, but doing so at a furious prestissimo. "They lack the flotation bladders and gill flaps that other fish have. So if they stop moving, they die."

Hannibal blinked at the sudden change of subject. "I did not know that. Why do you ask?"

"We're hunting a shark aren't we? I wondered what you knew about them," Will said picking at his food instead of eating it.

Hannibal studied Will and pondered each of his words. If he to a conclusion too quickly, he would miss the best parts, but if he savored them slowly, they always transformed into something of remarkable substance. Often, Will's simplest statements were rich with detail seven layers deep. "What is it that you think you are missing, Will?"

"Ballast."

"You are worried about dying then." It wasn't a question, just a statement, which Will could either agree with or challenge as the mood struck him. Sometimes it took a direct challenge to open him up to conversations about his innermost fears and desires. It was proof that while Will might be tragically blind to it, he was nevertheless a fighter through and through.

Will shook his head as he took the bait. "Sinking. We know so little about the things that live in the ocean's deepest parts, and the ones we do know about are monstrous. What if…," he stopped, unable or unwilling to voice his true fear. *'What if I become a monster while I'm down there,'* that was the thought that ate at Will's mind and body every night. It was the fear that consumed him daily.

"You know more than most about monsters. You have nothing to fear from them."

"Yeah," Will whispered. He drew into himself again. It was a habit Hannibal struggled to overcome because Will did not take direction easily. He liked to wander and avoid straight lines, which made it difficult if not impossible to lead him where Hannibal wanted him to go.

Hannibal reached across the table and placed his hand on top of his friend's. "I'll be your ballast, Will. We will rise or sink together, but I suspect I possess enough hot air for the both of us to stay afloat," he said and was rewarded with one of those rare smiles Will possessed. It was appreciative, warm, and beatifically trusting. Hannibal felt a rattle at one of the locked doors in the halls of his mind palace, and he moved away from it.

Revived once more, Will started shoveling food into his mouth again.

Hannibal set his fork down and studied the flora surrounding the picnic area until he thought his dining partner might be quite done. This behavior of Will's was most unusual. Until today, poor manners had not been a symptom of his condition. It was most puzzling indeed.

"We really should get moving," Will said. "Uncle Sam isn't paying us to soak up the sun."

“Very well. Will you grab another bottle of water for me before we depart?”

But Will was staring at Hannibal’s half-eaten lunch. “Are you going to finish that?”

Hannibal rolled his eyes and slid the container across the table. “No, it seems I was not hungry after all.”

It was only then that he saw the wicked glint in Will’s eyes as he took Hannibal’s plate from him with both hands. *‘Why you little devil. You’ve been doing this on purpose.’* He could not decide whether he was more irritated or amused by Will’s prank. “A clever piece of dinner theater, Will.”

Will smiled again, but this time there was a subtle twist of self-satisfaction and cruelty in the curve of his lips. “Why, Doctor Lecter, I thought you enjoyed the theater.”

# The Current Situation

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will arrive to find that the situation has already worsened and two of your favorite Jaws characters make their first appearance.

Chapter Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27

Sleepy, beachside towns were not generally prepared for the level of notoriety a killer shark brought with them. There were camera crews everywhere, lines to get on the beach, and a steady stream of foot traffic between the butcher's shop and the marina. It took thirty minutes to find parking—thirty minutes—in a town with a population that was only a little larger than Wolf Trap.

Otherwise, the city felt like it belonged in a Lifetime movie. The downtown was quaint and historic in a palette of pastel blues and pinks, and everywhere people smiled at their neighbors. It exuded that painted-on perfection that all chic, tourist towns did. One could *almost* call it pleasant.

Will was staring at a sign in front of an ice cream parlor. 'Lemon Shark Sunday Special, $3.00' the sign read. Below it, a smiling cartoon shark wolfed down a yellow scoop of ice cream.

Hannibal returned and spoke to him, but Will was barely paying attention to anything else besides the chalk drawing.

*"Will, I found a spot for the car, but there is an hour limit on the meter. I suggest we find this Chief Brody and have her show us to our accommodations before I am ticketed."*

The words sounded irritated and pressed, but Will was still much more interested in the grinning row of triangular teeth right in front of him. "Tasteless," he said and surprised himself when the word didn't come out as snarl. Four people were already confirmed dead, maybe five, and this was what the Good Humor man found humorous? Some part of Will hoped that whoever drew this sign was the next person to get eaten by the shark.

*"Will?"*

There was that voice again, but Will continued to pay it no mind until he felt a weight on his shoulder.

“WILL!,” Hannibal said and gave his shoulder a little shake. “Are you listening to me?”

The world came slowly back into focus. “Hmm? No, sorry, I was thinking,” he said and nodded at the sign. “It’s like you’d never know that there was a problem here. People are dying. Their neighbors are dying, and this is what passes for good salesmanship.”

Hannibal tugged at Will’s sleeve and guided him away from the shop. “It is only a problem because of the value we place on human life. Sharks kill things all the time. We don’t feel bad when a porpoise dies even though some species are endangered.”

Will pulled away from Hannibal’s grip. “Yeah, well, my job isn’t to save porpoises.”

“I did not see a lot of industry as we drove into town. Tourism is probably the only way this city survives. If they don’t adapt, they will die. Nobody wants to come to a town that is dangerous, but...”

Will glared at Hannibal. “They’re turning this shark into a celebrity. What if we dealt with people that way? Is that how you think we should treat the Ripper?” Will threw his arms out to his sides and twirled in the street like the ringleader of a circus. “Welcome to historic Baltimore! Home of the Chesapeake Ripper - the world’s wiliest little axe murderer and organ harvester!” he shouted.

Perhaps that was overly much. Instead of making his point, Will only made Hannibal laugh and drew looks from an elderly couple who walked arm-in-arm down the sidewalk. His psychiatrist was practically doubled over, and Will swore he saw tears in Hannibal’s eyes.

“I will leave the Ripper to you to deal with, Will.”

“For all the good it’s done us so far,” he said gloomily.

“Oh, you’ll catch him. Of that I have *no doubt* .”

Will tried to smile for Hannibal’s sake. He appreciated how Hannibal always tried to hold him up whenever that particular case began to drag him down. He was the only person Will could talk to about the Ripper who didn’t make him irritable. The science team didn’t get it. Alana just turned green, and Jack kept pushing him on it, which never helped. It only made Will feel guiltier that he hadn’t yet caught him.

But Hannibal made him feel *good* about the chase. It was a puzzle they could solve together, like Sherlock and Watson, and he spoke about the Ripper like Will had already caught him. Will could almost believe that it was just a matter of time before he put the noose around the Ripper’s neck. Hannibal’s assurances took the pressure off him, and made the whole thing less scary and immediate. *Christ,* Will wished they were back in Baltimore focusing on *that* case, but at least he had Hannibal around to distract him from Shark City.

The police station was a ten minute walk from the ice cream parlor. It sat on the water next to the town's main marina. There was a news van outside and two bored reporters leaning against it. They watched Will and Hannibal approach, but had no reason to suspect that they were anything other than two casual visitors to Tybee Island.

There was a desk at the entrance situated between two doors, which seemed to be the only two rooms on the first floor. An older woman sat behind it speaking to a middle-aged man who looked as ragged as Will felt most days and who reeked of cheap alcohol.

"No, Quint, the town doesn't have that kind of money. The Chief's already told you that."

"What the hell is money worth when you've got people dying out there, woman?" Quint said in a raised voice.

"Why Quint, I didn't know you cared. If it means that much to you, how about lowering your daily rate?"

"Not on your life. A shark this smart ain't worth dying for pennies on the dollar. You'll pay me though, *soon enough.* I think maybe you'll even pay triple when the time comes."

"I think we'll leave it to the boys from Washington. Off with you now. Get back to that rust bucket you call a boat," the woman said.

The old sailor laughed. It was a wet, mirthless sound tinged with the kind of melancholy that only those who were half-mad and rotten understood. He turned away and noticed Hannibal and Will standing beside the front door. Quint grinned revealing a pocked and yellowed set of teeth. He paid special attention to Hannibal, locking eyes with him until one of them blinked, which ended up being Quint. If he was sore about losing, the sea dog didn't show it. *"Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish ladies, farewell and adieu, you ladies of Spain, "* he sang as he drew near. When they were only two feet apart, he paused and leaned in, continuing to make eye contact only with Hannibal while placing a thick, gnarled hand on Will's shoulder. *"For we received orders for to sail for old Boston and we may ne'er see you fair ladies again."*

Quint's breath reeked of that special blend of Southern Comfort and NyQuil favored by a particular breed of gentleman. It brought back memories of boatyards, TV dinners, and late, sleepless nights in Biloxi. Will tried to wiggle out from under the older man's hand, but he held Will as tightly as his memories did.

Dylan, Tyler, and Springsteen combined could not have found words pure enough to describe the relief that Will felt when Quint departed—taking his foul breath with him. With that distraction on its way, Will removed his credentials from his pocket and held them out to the receptionist for inspection. "I'm Special Agent Will Graham. This is my colleague, Doctor Lecter. I'm here to see Chief Brody. I believe the Bureau already called ahead."

"Oh sure," she said merrily and stood up. She poked her head inside the door on her right. "Hey boss, that man from the FBI is here to see you. Can you spare a minute?"

"I can spare more than that if they can catch that goddamn shark!" a female voice said.

The receptionist held the door open for the pair and closed it behind them.

A woman approached them in a short-sleeved, khaki uniform. The chief was in her early forties and wore her hair up in a standard, military bun. She had brown eyes and wore glasses not unlike Will's. "Agent Graham is it?" she said and extended her hand... *to Hannibal.*

*Fuck,* Will thought glancing down at his wrinkled pants and faded button-up shirt. *I guess that's what I deserve.* "Actually, I'm Will Graham. This is my colleague, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal shook her hand anyway, and donned one of his winning smiles. "A pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"SHIT! I'm so sorry. I assumed…oh god, I mean--"

Will held up a hand to stop her apology before the current situation got any more awkward. "It's okay," he said and kicked himself mentally. This was a habit he was trying to break himself of under Hannibal's recommendation and guidance. It wasn't "okay," but how did one respond to something like that? *'It's fine.' 'Don't worry about it.' 'Happens all the time.'* They were useless platitudes and untruths, which only served to make the uninjured party feel better. If Will were another man, he could have handled it differently or at least more genuinely, but he wasn't. He was *this,* and he felt miserable.

Hannibal took a sudden interest in the view of the harbor and excused himself from the conversation to allow Will to regain his dignity.

"We were told to come here to see about accommodations, but I have to ask if there is anything new I should know about since you gave your last report to the Bureau," Will said.

Chief Brody still seemed flustered, but she sobered when asked about the case. "Unfortunately, yes. That missing girl finally turned up, or at least part of her did. The papers haven't reported it yet, but they will. Mayor's about to have my head if we don't catch this fish soon when he's willing to admit it even is a fish. Vaughn's got his head stuck so far up--" Brody stopped herself and bit down on her bottom lip. "Anyway, we're doing all right, but it's really only the media hype keeping the town afloat. *God, I hate saying that.* It sounds horrible, I know. I hope you boys can help."

Will frowned thinking about the ice cream parlor again. Five dead. *Bastards* . "I'll do my best."

"Whatever I can do, **whatever** , I'll do it. Just tell me what y'all need, and I'll get it for you."

"Well, a boat for starters."

"Done," she said and flipped him a set of keys that had been hanging from her belt. "You can take the department's boat. If you need gas for it, tell the boys down at the dock and they'll put it on our tab."

"And I'd like to see the bodies as soon as possible."

“Oh,” she said with an odd tilt to her voice. She also wasn’t looking at him directly anymore, and her expression became one of mild concern. Will’s palms grew clammy, but as he followed her gaze, he saw that she was looking at a clock that hung on the wall over his shoulder.

“It’s a small town. The coroner has usually gone home by now. There hasn’t been much to do around here until now, but the girl was just brought in so you might get luck--,” Brody caught herself before finishing that sentence, and at least had the decency to look embarrassed about it. “You might catch her before she leaves for the day.”

“Thanks. I won’t take up anymore of your time. I’ll touch base again once I’ve had the chance to look at what we’re dealing with.”

“Is that what he’s for? The autopsy?” Brody asked with a nod to Hannibal.

“I’m not that kind of doctor,” Hannibal said with a sly, half-smile. “I’m his psychiatrist.”

*Oh, thanks a lot, Hannibal,* Will fumed. He had wondered what the FBI might have told Brody about Will’s “unorthodox” methods of profiling and recent...*difficulties*. Clearly not enough because when she looked at Will again, she looked at him with uncertainty. Will tried not to fidget as he felt her pick apart his clothes, unkempt hair, and smudged glasses with a detective’s eyes. ‘*What kind of FBI agent needs a psychiatrist holding his hand?’* her expression said.

*The **me** kind; that’s what.*

Someone in the room coughed. Will looked toward the sound of the noise, which allowed him to escape his self-recriminations. It was Hannibal who had saved him once again. He stood at the window, his hair more gold than silver in the afternoon light, and he tapped his watch.

“Oh, we’re also parked at a meter. That’s not going to be a problem, is it? I don’t usually like to ask for special treatment, but if there’s a chance we can examine the bodies today…,”

Brody waved him off apparently coming to the conclusion that a lunatic’s help was better than no help. “Sure, no problem. If you get a ticket, just leave it with Marie and we’ll take care of it. Not that you will, mind you. Bud works that beat, and most days, he just sleeps in his car.”

They said their farewells. Will got directions from Marie, and he and Hannibal left by the back entrance so Will could get a look at the boat they’d be using. The boat was on the small side, but serviceable, and ought to be large enough.

Hannibal made an attempt at small talk, but Will rounded on him the moment he opened his mouth. “You’re a real piece of work, you know that? *‘I’m not that kind of doctor.’* Tell me *Doctor* Lecter, what kind of effect do you think *that* was going to have on the investigation? I’m sure she’s feeling real confident about the case right now. The FBI sends an agent they think needs a babysitter. Hah! Just swell. Would it have killed you to say you had been surgeon?”

“I think it is important to be open and honest about mental illness, Will. It is the only way we will ever erase the stigma surrounding it. However, I apologize if you feel that I’ve done you some injury,” Hannibal said but the apology was delivered to his pocket square as he occupied himself adjusting it.

Hannibal may have had said the words, but Will sensed no authenticity in them. In fact, Hannibal seemed almost annoyed that he was being reprimanded. It was only a slight crinkling of his eyes that gave him away, but Will had known him long enough now to know the signs.

“It’s not mental illness. I’m over-worked,” he insisted.

“If you say so, Will.”

Will glared at Hannibal, but he could only hold the expression for so long under the brute force of Hannibal’s calming presence. “Don’t talk to me,” he snapped and hurried ahead. For the first time in recent memory, Will was actually *looking forward* to the distraction of a pile of bodies.

# The Job

Chapter Summary

A reconstruction goes horribly wrong at the mortuary, and Will picks a fight with the female version of Hannibal (because that's exactly what the world needed: two of them). But is that jealousy I smell? Or blood? Dun-dun-dun. Dun-dun-dun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They caught the coroner as she was leaving. A minute later and they would have been too late so at least some things were working out today. Will allowed Hannibal to make their apologies and exchange the necessary pleasantries because he was better at that sort of thing. Within five minutes, the coroner had agreed to reopen the morgue despite being late for her tennis match. The coroner's name was Michelle Hendrix, but Hannibal kept referring to her as Michèle, using the French pronunciation. Cautiously, Will asked if she had been prepped by Brody or the FBI about his profiling methods. “No,” Doctor Hendrix said. “But I look forward to observing. Psychological profiling is a fascinating subject. I wish I could go back to school for a second degree, but I’m not fond of the idea of another ten years of student debt at my age.”

Will’s eyes drifted to Hannibal. Predictably, Mr. Two Degrees stood a little bit straighter than he had been a moment ago.

As Doctor Hendrix undid the locks on the front door, Will leaned in towards him. “Can you get her out of the room when I need you to?”

Hannibal nodded and grinned. “It would be my pleasure.”

Will looked at him suspiciously. “What do you mean by that?”

“Hmm? Exchanging ideas with a colleague is usually pleasant, Will. You should try it sometime.”

“That’s what I have you for.”

“Yes, but I do not wear a tennis skirt.”

Will tripped and blushed, which Hannibal responded to with a soft chuckle.

“Concentrate, Doctor Lecter. This isn’t a social event. You’re supposed to be helping me,” Will scolded.

“Some might argue I was. When is the last time you sought out the companionship of anyone on two legs who was not already your co-worker?"

“You know, I just remembered,” Will said and snapped his fingers in front of Hannibal’s nose, “I’m not talking to you.”

“You are a paradigm of maturity, Agent Graham,” Hannibal growled reverting to a more formal address in an expression of annoyance.

They stopped at Hendrix’s office so she could drop off her purse and tennis racket. Hannibal spent a few moments admiring her many awards and pictures from her studies abroad. “You certainly did not waste any time during your first tour of medical school. This is an impressive array of accomplishments," he said as he studied her degree. Doctor Hendrix was beaming under the attention. “Many of my most esteemed colleagues graduated from Yale. I chose Johns Hopkins. The program felt a little less...pretentious if you will forgive my saying.”

Will snorted and earned himself a sharp look from Hannibal.

“I will not,” she said but she was smiling in good humor, “and now I must question your manners on top of your credentials, Doctor," she teased.

Hannibal bowed—actually bowed—ever so slightly at the waist. “My apologies. I shall endeavor to make amends.”

“I beg your pardon, Doctor Lecter, but what area of medicine do you practice?”

“I was a surgeon,” Hannibal said without so much as a smirk.

Will, on the other hand, nearly choked on his tongue. *‘Oh, now he’s a surgeon?’* Which meant that Hannibal's behavior at the police station had been an intentional and mean spirited prank. What a jerk! ″I ought to leave you in the morgue,” Will grumbled under his breath. It wasn’t a serious threat, but his words made Will shiver anyway. That grotesque area of his mind from which his nightmares and talents both sprung, conjured the image of Hannibal lying still and lifeless on a lab table. In the vision, Will stood over the body waiting to feel a revulsion that never came. Dark ligature marks in royal purples and blues stood in stark contrast to Hannibal’s marble white skin. Will’s hand twitched. If he put his fingers around Hannibal’s throat, would the lines match up?

Will stepped towards the body. He felt responsible, but was he even capable of such a thing? The desire to know himself pulled at Will like a rip tide.

*“Will?”*

The voice belonged to Hannibal, but the blue lips of the corpse did not move.

*“Will?”*

A weight on his shoulder broke the spell, and Will found himself staring into Hannibal’s eyes while his brain restarted. The whole process took longer than a minute and less than an

eternity. Only afterward did it occur to him that Hannibal had positioned his body just so, in order to block Doctor Hendrix's view, while Will was lost in yet another fugue.

“Would you like to see the bodies now, Will?” he said.

“Yes, *thank you.* ”

Hannibal nodded with understanding.

...

When they reached the morgue, Doctor Hendrix passed out pairs of rubber gloves. Will stared at her under the bright mortuary lights and realized for the first time that she was *gorgeous*: tall, blonde, not his type at all, but classically pretty. It was obvious who her type was, and it wasn't Will. Grass green eyes cast quick, secretive glances at Hannibal, who appeared not to notice; however, he did catch Will staring at Hendrix twice. Will felt nervous and jittery under Hannibal's appraising gaze lest Hannibal get the wrong impression.

“I only have bodies five and six. The others have already been released to the families,” Doctor Hendrix said.

“Six? I thought there were only five as of this morning,” Will said.

Doctor Hendrix tucked a lock of hair behind her ear that had fallen out of a complicated braided updo.

“There *might* have been another one last year, Alex Kintner. It happened right at the end of the season. At the time, I thought Alex might have lost his leg in a boating accident. Propellers can do a lot of damage you know. Anyway, that’s what the autopsy report says so the media hasn’t connected the child’s death to the recent attacks.”

Will was struck dumb. “*A child* died and you didn’t think it was a good idea to warn the public? Or tell the FBI about this earlier?” Will's righteous anger was rising, and suddenly, Hendrix didn't look so pretty anymore.

“Labor Day Weekend, it’s...**important** to the town.”

Will took a step towards her, but Hendrix didn’t back down. In fact, she step forward and leaned into the threat.

“Don’t,” she snapped. “Don’t lecture me about my reasoning! You’re an outsider. You don’t know what it’s like during a down year. Well it’s been ten straight years of down years! The drought sent the whole goddamn state into a depression. It only broke three years ago, and people are still struggling to come back. When there were no further attacks, I let the matter go. The town had a great Labor Day and nobody struggled that winter.” There was no guilt in her voice, no regret. Her defense and the strength of her conviction was steel, but Will was *very good* at breaking things.

He clasped his hands behind his back. “And five more will never struggle again,” Will whispered at her ear before Hannibal pulled him away by the collar of his shirt. He stepped in

front of Will and caught Hendrix by the wrist before she slapped him.

“Your friend is rude, Doctor Lecter,” Hendrix said to Hannibal, but she looked right at Will when she said it.

Hannibal softened his grip and slid his hand up until he was holding hers. “He can be, but please, I ask that you forgive Agent Graham. We have been on the road for many hours and will not be fit company until we have rested and fed ourselves,” Hannibal laid his free hand over his heart to playfully communicate sincerity. When her eyes relaxed, he offered his arm to her and allowed himself to be led to the far wall where the coolers sat.

Will padded behind them watching the odd exchange. What was Hannibal up to? He was acting even more like Lithuanian nobility than usual. Was he interested in Hendrix sexually? It made sense...he guessed. She certainly was beautiful, but superficial qualities alone wouldn’t be enough to attract Hannibal’s attention. Hendrix wore a fitness tracker around her wrist so health was important to her. They shared common professional interests, and she had clearly been at the top of her class. She was younger than Hannibal, but a little older than Will, and had travelled the world more extensively. Sure she lacked his dramatic flare, *thank God* (one Hannibal Lecter in the world was enough), but there was a similarity about them. She carried herself...*regally* even in this humdrum town where such airs were not necessary. Hannibal did that too only extrapolated to the tenth power. Did Hendrix have that same savoir faire deep down? If Hannibal was interested in her, then he probably saw something Will did not, and that too made sense. Hannibal understood people in the way that Will understood dead bodies and psychopaths. Metaphorically, he and Hannibal were two sides of the same coin. *‘But ne’er the two shall meet.’*

Hendrix unhooked herself from Hannibal’s arm and retrieved the remains of the older victim, victim number five.

Hannibal stepped aside to allow Will access, but Will motioned for his psychiatrist to remain. “Please, Doctor Lecter, let’s hear your thoughts...*as a surgeon*.”

Part pout, part glare, part threat of violent intent, the look Hannibal gave him was one Will would treasure forever. When he was quite through, Hannibal straightened his tie and stepped towards what remained of the body although calling it a body was being generous. All that had been recovered of the dead man was a thigh, hip, and left butt cheek. Hannibal studied the corpse for about five minutes, but Will, who had watched Hannibal’s eyes the entire time, knew that he’d made up his mind after two.

“The shark was not the only creature to have made a meal out of this man. These puncture marks and the patches of missing skin indicate that the local fauna helped themselves to a veritable feast before the victim was delivered to your tender care, dear Doctor.”

Hendrix smiled and fiddled with that loose lock of hair again.

“They consumed any beneficial forensic evidence that a more detailed analysis of the tissue might have provided,” Hannibal continued.

“We’d only need forensics if this was a murder, which we already know it’s not,” Will said annoyed that Hannibal was wasting time with such trivial observations.

“Of course,” Hannibal said without even a nod in Will’s direction. “May I, Doctor?” he asked and waved his hand over the carcass with an air of civility that was entirely out-of-place in this backwater mortuary.

*I don’t believe it,* Will thought, now positively certain of about his theory: Hannibal had a little crush on Doctor Hendrix and was posturing for her like a peacock. ‘*Of all the ridiculous…*’

Hendrix nodded in approval.

Hannibal picked up what remained of the thigh and peeled back the ribbons of rotting flesh and muscle to expose the broken femur. He ran his thumb across the nub, which protruded from the base of the bloated limb. “This is a clean cut. There is no shattering of the bone. Something with the ability to exert a tremendous amount of torque clamped down on this man and snapped his legs off at the knees.”

“Your conclusion, Doctor Lecter?” Will prompted growing tired of this soap opera romance. If Hannibal wanted to impress the hot doctor, he could do it off the clock on his own time.

Hannibal gently laid the remains down. He stripped off his gloves and disposed of them immediately. “While not my area of expertise, I can say with some confidence that I do not believe this was a boating accident.”

Will kept silent, but he gave Hendrix a look that said it all. *‘See? Not a boating accident.’* But his satisfaction over her loss, quickly evaporated when he remembered that there was still one more body left to analyze, and it was his turn at bat. Will sighed and removed his glasses.

Hannibal needed no further sign than that. He felt the change in the wind, and performed as expected. “Doctor, will you walk me back to your office? I saw your photos of the Basilica of San Zeno and would love to hear about your memories of Verona while my colleague finishes up here.”

“Are you sure he--”

“Quite sure,” Hannibal interjected with his usual firmness of faith in Will and his abilities.

Will closed his eyes and imagined himself plucking those words from the air physically. He turned them over in his mind feeling the tone and timber of them until they felt like they belonged to him. It had been a long day already, and Will hadn’t been his best self since the Sheriff’s office so he found his strength elsewhere. He fed on Hannibal’s confidence in him and let it carry him to that place where the nightmares waited. He knew he was being watched. The hairs on the nape of his neck pricked under the scrutiny of Hannibal and Hendrix, but he was rapidly starting not to care.

Will’s eyes remained closed until he heard the click of the heavy mortuary doors behind him and the retreating cantor of two sets of footsteps. Finally, he was alone, and for a moment,

Will stood and luxuriated in the feeling of drawing breath without the usual tightness in his chest. But he still had a job to do.

The job. His Holy War.

The job kept him anchored to his values and morality but also might be killing him.

He moved down the line of lockers trailing his fingers delicately across the metal doors. Three doors down, he found her: Vanessa Stillwell, victim number six.

Will popped open the door and slid the gurney out into the open air. There was approximately the same amount of material as the last one, but Will's victim came with a head. *Lucky him.* She was a natural redhead, and with her pale skin, sharp cheekbones, and curly hair she could have been the little sister of Freddie Lounds. For half a breath, he saw Freddie lying there, cold and dismembered. Will stuffed a cork on that line of thought as soon as it materialized. Too risky to let anything more substantive bubble up to the surface. His victim, *the shark's victim*, was Vanessa Stillwell.

Her head was attached to part of a torso and a fully intact arm. There was a pronounced tan line on what remained of her shoulder, which looked like it came from a bikini strap not a tank top. There were deep defensive cuts along her forearm probably from the shark's teeth. Had she tried to fight it off in those last terrified moments? He hoped so. If you were going to go down, might as well go down swinging.

And now he'd come to it—the oily, grating plunge that allowed him to save more lives than he took. He knew he'd lie awake tonight wondering if anyone would take that same plunge to save him, but as he felt the corrosive burn gather in his stomach, he hoped that no one ever would. Will wouldn't wish his gifts on his worse enemy, not even the Ripper...*especially* not the Ripper.

Will closed his eyes again to make the world go dark. When he opened them, the room *remained* dark.

It was cold here.

Empty.

*Lonely.*

***I drift listlessly in a world of shifting blues. No one touches me. No one talks to me. I don't need these things.***

Suddenly, he wasn't alone anymore. He felt it more than heard it, felt it on a cellular level. There was something there with him in the void. Her, him, it...these pronouns didn't matter anymore, but someone or something had invaded his private world. He couldn't see it, and it couldn't see him. They existed on two separate planes: one above and one below.

***I move towards you. Rising. Searching. Longing for the one thing that will fill this dull ache inside me, my only companion in this solitude.***

His prey materialized out of the blue darkness, and he rushed forward with a sweep of his tail.

***The internal alarm system that keeps all lesser beasts safe from harm goes off like a firework inside your mind. You turn towards me and scream, but I already have you. Blue turns to red and ties you to me indefinitely.***

The visual changed as the water turned red with blood and drove Will mad with an emotion that went well beyond hunger. The dull ache inside his chest cracked open as he slid the knife down the length of her torso and then across her gut with a second strike. He reveled in the savage thirst that rose up from the fissure while her mouth went slack with resigned horror. She kept fighting, held together by only adrenaline and terror now, but soon enough awareness began to flicker and dim inside her eyes. He gripped her by the hair and positioned her body for the killing blow. His other hand tightened around the handle of his knife, and plunged it into the opening he had carved into her. This was the best part. He pushed up and up, slicing through organs seeking the heart. The tip of his blade got caught in her rib cage at one point. He thrashed until it came free, and with one last push buried his blade into the organ. The heart continued to beat: once, twice, three times, *and stilled.*

He sighed and pushed off, leaving the blade inside the body. Content and sated, he looked down on the corpse, which glowed ethereally under the light of a street lamp.

***This is my...***

But something was off about this picture. Something he couldn't quite pin-point in his distracted, euphoric state. *This was not his design.* It was all wrong. He shouldn't be here. He was supposed to be elsewhere. He was supposed to ***be something else*** .

***No. Oh God, no. What have I done?***

He couldn't separate signal from substance anymore. Blood was everywhere. It coated his body and hers and kept him warm even after the thrill had faded. There was blood on his face too. He licked his lips, swallowed, and then Will Graham began screaming.

Will came back into himself abruptly and scuttled backwards. In his haste to get away from the tattered body on the autopsy table, he tripped and fell hard onto the tile floor.

Apparently, Will's screams had only taken place in his mind, but he heard them long after the other sensations had withdrawn. He sat up and covered his ears until they faded too.

No one burst through the door to check on him after the fall, which Will was grateful for. He needed a moment to get a handle on himself and figure out what the fuck had gone wrong with his reconstruction.

That wasn't how a shark killed, but it was mind of a predator he had inhabited for however long he had been under. *Oh Christ,* had that darkness come from inside him? *Please, no.* He couldn't be that far gone. He just *couldn't.* "Help me…," Will whimpered, but he was alone until Hannibal's voice came to him.

*‘It wasn't the act of killing Hobbs that got you down, was it? Did you really feel so bad because killing him felt so good?’*

The words felt like a memory from another lifetime. Hannibal had brought him close to tears that day with his persistent questioning, but today the warm, rich tones of his voice soothed Will’s distress. And Will's memories of the Hobbs's kitchen were a perversely welcomed relief.

“I liked killing Hobbs,” Will told the mortuary tables, but his voice sounded very different in the present from what he remembered: less frightened, more...tolerant. What was not different were the feelings that the death of Garrett Jacob Hobbs still stirred in him. Shooting a killer like Hobbs had made Will feel powerful and whole. He felt *righteous* . He hadn’t felt like that when he was killing Vanessa Stillwell in the reconstruction. What Will had just experienced was gluttony, cruelty, and a jurassic hunger for pain not food.

Will didn’t feel the blood on his skin anymore, but he still felt dirty. His memory helped him solve cases, but it also meant that those murders stayed with him long after they ought to. Today's episode could have been dredged up from any combination of those memories. Hannibal was always warning Will that experiences were shaping his subconscious thoughts. It was the natural consequence of the work he did, and this was Will’s reward. Should he tell Hannibal about this episode? No, he couldn’t yet. He’d be pulled out of here faster than you could fry an egg in the microwave and probably be driven directly to the BSHCI.

*‘But I’m not a criminal,’* he reminded himself. *‘I didn’t kill this girl and I didn't kill Marissa Schurr or Cassie Boyle either.'*

Will got back onto his feet. He stripped off his gloves and walked over to the sink.

The cold water on his face and neck brought him all the way back to the present. He could tell Hannibal about the hallucination later *after* they caught the shark and were far away from any related triggers. Will knew he'd have to be honest about this incident eventually; he didn’t want to hurt anyone if he really was losing his mind. If the FBI needed to know about it, he’d let Hannibal make that determination. It’s what they paid him for after all.

Will was suddenly very grateful to Jack for sending Hannibal along with him. It was becoming apparent that Will couldn’t do this job alone anymore. He’d been broken beyond repair by it, but at least he had people in his life who could glue him back together when he shattered. Bev, Alana, *Hannibal*...hell, even Price and Zeller weren’t so bad. What a difference a few months made. Will had a life now, friends who were like family, and a job that was meaningful.

*The job,* his dark mistress again. They still had unfinished business to attend to.

Will tried to reconstruct the attack again and couldn’t even reach the detached state of mind, which allowed him to ‘look’. He tried a third time, and it was as ineffective as his previous attempt. “Because you can’t profile a shark like I’ve been saying this whole time,” Will grumbled. But now what did he do? It was petty, but Will didn’t want to walk back into Hendrix’s office with no new intel. He rubbed the bridge of his nose. One of his headaches was coming on so whatever he was going to do, he better do it soon. “Okay, good old-

fashioned detective work it is," he said to himself. He popped four advil into his mouth and got himself a new pair of gloves.

Will measured the length of the victim's arm. From there, he came up with an approximate height for Vanessa. Beverly would have smacked him for the inaccuracy of his science, but he wasn't trying for perfection here. If he walked away knowing even the approximate size of the shark that would give him a better idea of what gear to buy at minimum.

*But how do I do that?*

It was a big shark, that much was obvious, but what did that even mean? Fifteen feet? Twenty? The wound indicated that she was bitten cleanly in two, like victim five. Her injuries didn't show signs of a frenzied, wild feeding either. The shark had come upon this swimmer, taken its fill, and left. The expression on Vanessa face and cuts along her arms suggested that it had probably played with its food just a little like a child poking at his dinosaur chicken nuggets. "You certainly are a naughty fish," Will said as he bent down to get a closer look at the fatal wound.

Something caught his eye, a glint of white among the strips of muscle and tissue hanging off what remained of Vanessa's frame. Will peeled back a flap of tattered skin and reached inside the body. There was something large lodged in the collar bone. He felt around it trying to guess by touch what it could be. The unidentified object was sharp, which made him think of the knife from his hallucination. Will choked on a mouthful of bile remembering what he had done in the reconstruction—*thought he had done,* he reminded himself. He forced himself to swallow, and closed his hand around the object. With two quick tugs, he pulled it free and found himself staring at a large, triangular tooth. Will looked at the size of the tooth and went back over what he'd read about shark teeth. He whistled when he arrived at the conclusion that they were dealing with a fish that was *at least* twenty feet long, maybe longer. Will washed the gore from the tooth and pocketed it. Technically the tooth was evidence, but since no one was disputing that this was a shark attack, he decided to take it with him so he could take more accurate measurements later. This was a fishing trip, not a hunt. The shark wasn't going to be brought up on charges when this was over so there was no chain of evidence to be concerned about.

He cleaned the autopsy room. He didn't have to, but Will needed to use his hands to set something right. Guilt still weighed heavily on him, and he needed to bury it before he saw Hannibal again. He'd confess everything if he saw him now.

Will rejoined Hannibal and Hendrix in her office when he was finished. They were laughing at a dumb joke involving corollaries and coronaries. Hannibal had removed his jacket and was leaning against the window looking casual and joyful. Will was glad that at least one of them was having a good day.

"Will! So good of you to join us," he said like Will had some choice in the matter. "Did you find anything interesting?"

The tooth felt like a loaded gun at his hip. Will shoved a hand into his pocket and thumbed the edge recklessly. "Yeah. We're going to need a bigger boat."

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27. God save the Queen! Long may she reign! :-)

# A Disquiet Mind

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will move into their temporary residence onboard the Jonah. Will has an another episode while Hannibal grapples with some inconvenient compassion.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dogs were easy. Sure they took a lot of work to care for, but if you fed them, played with them, and showed them a minimal amount of attention they adored you despite your manifest faults and deficiencies.

People were different. People required small talk, compromise, apologies, forgiveness, etc. People were difficult.

And then there was Hannibal Lecter, another breed of animal all together.

Will sat at a small table adjacent the kitchenette thumbing through pages of one of the many books on sharks he'd checked out from the library before they had left the D.C. area. Hannibal meanwhile busied himself in the tiny galley by playing Tetris with the groceries.

The boat they had rented belonged to victim number four, a man named Ben Gardner. Everything else of serviceable size had been snapped up by the dozens of shark hunters chasing that million dollar reward. The *Jonah* was a middling fishing vessel with two berths at the bow of the ship and the reason why Hannibal was pissed at him. Rather than pay double for lodgings at the Avalon Inn, Will had argued the simplest course of action was to sleep onboard until the shark was found. Looking now at the cramped, dingy cabin he regretted forcing the arrangement on Hannibal. Everything from the red shag carpet to the pine wood paneling was contrary to Hannibal's aesthetic, and Will could only imagine how miserable he was in that kitchen with a mere twenty-four inches of usable counter space available to him.

Hannibal had been courteous but curt after the initial fight while Will gave him the grand the tour and taught him all the names of the equipment onboard. He had since gone silent and retreated to pedestrian tasks he had not been asked to do. Like an itch that was inappropriate to scratch, this cold shoulder routine made Will a little nuts...but how did he fix it? He and Hannibal were beyond the safe harbor of their doctor-patient relationship, navigating new and muddy waters together. Here, onboard the *Jonah,* he was just Hannibal.

Will glanced up from his research and discreetly watched Hannibal from beneath the cover of his messy bangs. Hannibal wore a red long sleeved shirt, loose pants, and suede slippers with a soft collar of lamb's wool circling his ankles. He looked relaxed in this setting, but he did

not look natural without his waistcoats and pocket squares. What if this was natural for him and the waistcoats were the disguise? Honestly, what did Will really know about the daily habits and behavior of Hannibal Lecter outside their police work and the occasional friendly dinner? '*I know nothing about him,'* Will realized. At best Will could fill out a one page dossier on the man. '*How have we worked together all this time and yet...I know nothing about him except his wine preferences?'* Whereas, Hannibal was the authority on the subject of the mind of Will Graham. There was little his psychiatrist didn't know about him already, and Will trusted him completely with that knowledge. So while Hannibal might be Will's friend, he knew the relationship was not equal. Then an even more unsettling thought found purchase in his mind: *'what if I wanted to change that?'*

Would that even work? Ordinarily, Will wasn't one to reach out to others for companionship, but maybe he could make an exception and maybe get to know Hannibal a little better as a person. They could be here for awhile on this boat together, he told himself. No reason that time shouldn't be as tolerable as possible, and truthfully, Will was lonely being so far from home and away from his dogs.

It had been a long time since he'd had a friend, a real friend, and he had been terrible at it as he recalled. Will wasn't even sure he remembered how to make friends, which only added to his anxiety, so instead of enquiring about Hannibal's day or opening up a line of safe, easy conversation around a shared interest, what Will blurted out instead was: "carcharodon carcharias." At least he didn't trip over the Greek.

Hannibal had since switched from putting things away to preparing their evening meal. He asked Will to repeat himself but didn't look up from his potatoes.

"Carcharodon carcharias," Will said holding up one of the books. "The shark we're looking for. I was right, it's a great white. See?"

Hannibal looked up from his work and squinted at the illustration in the dimly lit cabin. With an annoyed sigh, he put the potato peeler down and wiped his hands on a towel. Hannibal walked over to the table closing the distance in three steps with his long legs and leaned into Will's space. He smelled like potatoes meaning he smelled like wet dirt and rotten leaves. A wave of nausea rolled over Will as memories of crimes scenes, new and old, ran roughshod through his brain. Dead faces peeked up at him from their shallow graves like budding flowers, and in each memory, Hannibal was there at Will's side even in recollections where it didn't make sense for him to be there. The ripe aroma of the graves clung to Hannibal like honey, but beneath that—if Will leaned in a little closer—he could still make out the scent of Hannibal's cologne mixed with olive oil. The smell soothed the acid burn in his chest, and made Will feel warm and safe again in the presence of so much death.

"Will," Hannibal said to him while they stood in the center of a mass grave fifty miles south of Nashville. He knew this wasn't really happening. The case was eight months old and tightly closed—another Will Graham success story—but the crime scene looked as fresh as the day he'd first climbed into that hole.

"Will, where are you?"

“Columbia, Tennessee,” Will replied robotically and stepped further into Hannibal’s orbit where the comforting smells were.

“The Gold Digger. That was a hard case for you,” Hannibal said and placed his hand on Will’s shoulder.

“It was a victory,” Will said dryly and counted the bodies within his line of sight. “I saved lives.”

“Not these lives.”

Will looked up and frowned at Hannibal. There was a meanness in his voice that Will found grating. “No, not these lives.”

Hannibal’s hand tightened on his shoulder. “How does it make you feel, Will? Being back here?”

Will brushed Hannibal’s hand off him, his irritation growing. “It’s always the same question with you. ‘*How do you feel, Will?"* How do you think I feel, Doctor Lecter? Let me ask **you** a question: how do you *want* me to feel?”

Hannibal remained cool and unaffected under the knife of Will’s anger. “You were **very** afraid the last time we spoke about it—so much death—it was hard for you to take in, this many bodies.”

“Yeah, well I’m not afraid now,” Will grumbled.

“No, you’re not. You’ve grown very strong. What changed?”

“I caught him,” but the words did not reassure Will. “I caught him so there's no more reason to be afraid,” but the words rang hollow as his anxiety grew. “Oh, I don’t know?! What are you driving at?”

His psychiatrist folded his hands in front of his body and leaned back, distancing himself from Will. It was only a matter of inches, but it felt like miles of separation. The sickly sweet smell of death grew more stringent causing Will to shiver. “That’s not it. You were afraid even after you caught the Gold Digger, Will. You told me so. Do you remember?”

“I--I don’t know,” Will said and looked down at the ground to get away from Hannibal’s scrutiny. A child’s hand stuck out of the ground at his foot. One of those woven friendship bracelets encircled its bloated wrists. Will turned away and counted the bodies again. There were more than the last time, but that wasn’t possible. Was it? He counted a third time and reached and even larger total. Some of the faces he recognized now: Elise Nichols, Cassie Boyle, Marissa Shur, and many more. Some were confirmed Ripper kills. Some were merely hypotheticals, but all of them had their faces turned towards Will and Hannibal accusatorially.

“Did you change, Will? Is that why your fear is gone?” Hannibal asked.

Will clutched his chest with a trembling hand. “Doctor Lecter…I don’t feel so good.” The tremor in his hand spread like a rash over his body. Heart, hand, and head all began to vibrate like the brass kettle of a bell when struck. He looked up at Hannibal, into his dark, serious eyes, and held them with his own. '*Help me,'* he wanted to say, but his mouth would not form the words. He was stuck...no, he was sinking! Terror blossomed in his like a firework. He didn't want to go down this path. This was not what he wanted. *‘Help me, Hannibal! You promised! Ballast!! Remember?’*

Hannibal’s curiosity changed to sadness and resignation. “I think you should wake up now, Will. You have a monster still to catch,” he said.

A salt breeze blew through the Tennessee forest and banished the stink of death to the far reaches of Will’s mind.

“What?” Will asked as the wind picked up in intensity.

“I said…,” Hannibal began to say but his words were swallowed whole by the wind.

…

“WILL!!!” Hannibal shouted in his ear. “Can you hear me?!”

Will blinked and looked around. The bodies were gone. The forest was gone. He sat at a table in front of a pile of books with the smell of salt heavy in the air. The only thing that was unchanged was the wind, which blew hard enough to rock the boat. “Huh? What happened?” he asked.

“I was hoping you could tell me,” Hannibal sighed and gave Will a little shove. “Make room, if you please.”

Dazed, Will scooted over into the corner of the booth and allowed Hannibal to sit down on the bench beside him. “I--I was dreaming. I think. I was in Columbia and you were there.” Saying it out loud like this made Will feel like Dorothy after she returned from Oz. Well Dorothy could bite him and Toto too. What Will wouldn't give for a villain that could be defeated with something as simple as water.

“The Gold Digger,” Hannibal said drawing Will’s attention back to Kansas. “I remember the case well. It was an unsettling experience for you. All those bodies...terrible business.”

“We were at the crime scene together in my, ahh, my dream.” ‘Dream’ sounded better than 'vacation from reality'. Maybe Hannibal would believe that he really had simply fallen asleep at the table due to exhaustion. “Did I say anything while I was...out?”

The look Hannibal gave him was all the information Will needed to confirm his worst fear. It was no dream. He had hallucinated again, and this time, Hannibal knew and had borne witness to it all. “I’m sorry,” Will said feeling guilty about hiding his earlier episode at the morgue, which he still had no intention of admitting to.

“You have done nothing meriting an apology, Will,” Hannibal said and placed a hand on Will’s forehead. “You do not feel warm, hrrmm. I wish I had a proper diagnosis to give you, but I do not. One minute, you were here, and the next minute, you were gone. It is I who am most sorry. I told you that you would be in my care, but sometimes you slip away when I am not paying attention and I can find no cure for it.”

“So we didn’t talk about the case?” Will asked again.

“You were mute and motionless like the time I found you in your classroom.”

“Oh,” Will said sadly. Even when the hallucination had begun to dismantle itself at the end, their conversation had still felt real. Maybe he was going crazy. Maybe he always was.

Hannibal picked up Will’s hand and gave it a squeeze before guiding it back to one of the books, which lay open before them. “Tell me about the shark, Will. Tell me about great whites.”

Will looked at Hannibal’s hand laying on top of his own and felt his strength and composure returning. “They are the world’s greatest predator. What else is there to say?”

“Oh?” Hannibal said with mild amusement. He let Will’s hand go and rested his chin on the back of his knuckles. “Tell me more. That seems far too simple for the animal to deserve such a compliment.”

…

**EARLIER**

Hannibal had already surrendered to the situation two hours ago, but there was no reason not to have a little fun at Will’s expense as payment. It was only fair. Very little about these accommodations appealed to him with the exception of his close proximity to Will, so he took his rewards where he could find them. Thankfully, Will had taken the bait. Who knew silence could such an effective instrument against him? The air was thick with his nervous energy. Hannibal had assumed incorrectly that Will was a man that enjoyed the quietude; however, his agitation was unmistakable even if Hannibal could find no reason for it. Then again Will was behaving very oddly as his mysterious illness progressed. Could this new sociable side of him be a symptom of that sickness? Or was Will finally beginning to find Hannibal interesting?

Regardless of the reason, toying with Will’s emotions today had been tremendous fun. Hannibal worried he might never be content again with only their hour-long sessions to look forward to each week after this extended stay in each other’s company. Perhaps the Ripper would need to plan another dinner party when they returned to Baltimore. Police work always brought Will around more often than what was regular, and Jack could always be counted on to never leave the poor boy alone if the Ripper was in town.

Sadly, the present game had run its course. Will had looked up from his research only once in the last twenty minutes to study Hannibal with those piercing, perpetually sad eyes of his.

Only once! Hannibal was ready to yield and ask if Will would like some whiskey when Will finally spoke up. “Carcharodon carcharias.”

Derived from the Greek words ‘karcharos’—sharpen—and ‘odous’—teeth—it was a fitting name for a shark, but *their* shark was no common predator. It was a great white. No other creature incited as much terror as the great fish, and despite his disinterested outward appearance, the prospect of seeing such a beast up-close was a novelty that excited Hannibal. And if Will should be the one to catch and kill it….well, all the better.

“Come again?” Hannibal asked feigning ignorance. Playing down to the market was a distasteful hand to play, but for Will’s sake, he could make the sacrifice. He knew that letting Will explain the science to him would serve as a better bridge back to friendlier conversation than anything else he could hope for much as it displeased him.

“Carcharodon carcharias,” Will repeated and beckoned Hannibal over to his side.

As Hannibal approached, Will’s face went slack and his eyes hazy. The book would have fallen onto the floor with a loud crash if Hannibal had not caught it as it slipped from Will’s hands.

Setting the book onto the table, Hannibal leaned over and peered down into Will’s face. “Will? Will? Can you hear me?” he asked but Will did not respond. The doctor gently slapped the side of Will’s cheek, but still his patient remained unresponsive.

Genuine fear gripped Hannibal. Had Will’s illness advanced as far as this? He thought he would have more warning. The doctor was about to leave and retrieve his medical bag when Will leaned forward and made a noise that sounded like Hannibal’s own name.

That made Hannibal feel more at ease. He stayed and allowed Will to get as close as Will felt comfortable with in his unconscious state.

“Will? Where are you?” Hannibal asked while Will rested his head against Hannibal’s stomach.

“Columbia, Tennessee.”

‘*Interesting,'* Hannibal thought.

The Gold Digger had been a particularly nasty case, and the largest mass grave Will had ever reconstructed. Will had closed that case by himself while the science team was occupied with other work back in D.C., which Hannibal had viewed as particularly reckless on Jack’s part. Making the arrest was easy to do with the help of local law enforcement once Will identified that the killer was removing a piece of gold jewelry from each of his victims before killing them. A simple canvassing of local pawn shops produced their suspect, but the effects of that case were as difficult to remove as clay from beneath one’s fingernails.

“The Gold Digger. That was a hard case for you,” Hannibal said and put an hand on Will’s shoulder.

“It was a victory,” Will said dispassionately. “I saved lives.”

Hannibal closed his eyes and tried to project himself into the fantasy, imagining what Will must be seeing. All those bodies, half uncovered and rotten after a heavy rain. It would have been a terrible sight for Will to absorb. Had he crawled into that hole fifty different times and processed each murder as a unique experience? Or had tried to do it all at once? Had he showered or slept afterwards? Or did he drink himself into oblivion instead? What had he thought? What had he felt?

“Not these lives,” Hannibal said, Saving lives was how Will justified his destructive loyalty to his job—a loyalty Hannibal needed to replace with something stronger. That started with Will accepting the futility of his efforts. There was always another killer out there spreading chaos—bodies on top of bodies, world without end, but those bodies need not all be innocents. If Will could see that by taking a life, he might save more...well then, the possibilities were endless.

He led Will through a series of questions, directing Will’s mind to the changes he must surely have begun to feel inside his breast. All too soon Will pushed back, rejecting the mental reconditioning, so Hannibal mirrored his behavior by physically separating himself from Will. The effect was immediate and significant. Will’s eyes went wide and filled with terror.

“Doctor Lecter...I don’t feel so good,” he pleaded.

Hannibal warred with himself outside of Will’s physical reach, but not beyond his influence. He wanted to help, but this was a weakness Hannibal needed to overcome in himself. To save Will and their friendship, Hannibal had to change him first and that would require both strength and detachment.

So the doctor held himself back, hands balled into fists, while his patient shook and whimpered. When he saw Will beginning to come around on his own, Hannibal moved in quickly and did not need to feign concern. “Will? WILL!!! Can you hear me?”

Will was unable to respond immediately. “Huh? What happened?” He said when the fog finally cleared. He looked exhausted and scared but in full command of his mental faculties.

Hannibal let out a breath he did not know he had been holding. “I was hoping you could tell me,” he lied and tapped Will on the shoulder. “Make room, if you please.”

Will made a place for him on the bench and dodged his questions about the Gold Digger, but Hannibal did not pursue the matter further. He allowed Will to regroup and focus on the case instead. He listened to him lecture about the maneater they were pursuing, and when Will had exhausted his knowledge of the physiology of sharks, Hannibal suggested that they worry about feeding themselves instead of worrying about what the shark was eating.

“It’s awfully late isn’t it?” Will asked.

“It will not be if you assist me. Come,” he said and offered his hand to Will.

Hand-in-hand, Hannibal escorted Will to the potato station and handed him a knife. “Slice these no more than a quarter of an inch thick,” he instructed. “I want to see your knife skills.”

Will’s knife skills were excellent as it turned out.

“Filleting a fish is harder than slicing a potato,” Will reminded him after Hannibal complimented him.

“Do you always eat what you catch?”

“Not always. There would be too much. I’m good a fisherman,” Will winked.

“I am sure you are, Will,” Hannibal said.

*‘But can you catch me?’*

…

After dinner, Will helped Hannibal put away the dishes and clean the galley. Will was back to his old self and far away from the nightmares that gave him so much heartache. But Hannibal was tired, and there was still one thing they needed to discuss before retiring to bed. “Will, about tonight's sleeping arrangements…,”

“It’s not a problem. There are two berths in the main cabin. No one has to sleep on the floor tonight,” Will explained as he finished drying the last dish.

“That is not what I meant. Are you still sleepwalking?”

Will did not answer.

“Your behavior earlier has me worried.”

“I'm fine,” Will huffed.

“We are on a boat, Will. If you fell overboard and drowned, I could never forgive myself.”

“We’ll lock the door.”

“You of all people should know how ineffective a locked door is against a determined mind.”

The FBI agent flinched but shook it off. “Yeah, well, it’s the situation unless you’ve got any better ideas.”

“I do in fact,” Hannibal said and reached into his back pocket to remove the handcuffs he had lifted from Chief Brody.

Will dropped the towel into the sink and stumbled backwards into a cabinet. It was a fear driven response from a man who worried about madness more than death. “No,” Will said in a weak voice. “Anything but that, please.”

The handcuffs dangled from the end of Hannibal's middle finger. "I am sorry, Will, but as your doctor I must insist."

"No," Will repeated, "isn't there some other way? I--I don't want to be restrained like I'm a…," but Will trailed off unable to finish the sentence.

"...a criminal?" Hannibal offered. The word hung in the air between them like a fly caught in a spider's web. It was a cruel and horrific thing that Hannibal was doing to him now, but there was no other choice. Hannibal did not trust his drugs to keep Will under all night with whatever was going on with him medically, but he would not risk further injury to his favorite plaything.

He laid the handcuffs on the table and closed the distance between them. "Hey," Hannibal said and bracketed Will's face with his hands. "I do this to protect you, Will. Please, believe me. I would never let them lock you up," he promised.

Will searched Hannibal's eyes and with a small nod accepted one truth and one lie.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27. <3 <3 <3 ALSO, if you haven't seen it yet, go check out the amazeballs fanart @cannibalhouse drew for this fic! I love it so!

Now for the bad news, no updates for the next two weeks as I'll be away at RDC3 and then vacation the following week, but maybe I'll see some of you at the con!

# Anchors Aweigh, My Boys, Anchors Aweigh!

Chapter Summary

Out on the open water, a new dynamic emerges between Hannibal and Will as the hunt for the killer shark begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It took two cups of coffee and a short stack of blueberry pancakes to get Will on deck and in tolerable spirits after a night spent handcuffed to his captain's bed. Five minutes is all it took to rile him back up again thanks to the efforts of the colorful Captain Quint.

The old seadog's boat the *Orca* occupied the slip beside the *Jonah* at the dock. As such, he had a pretty good view of the deck and criticized everything Hannibal and Will did on board as they made ready for their maiden voyage.

"A bit unsteady on them twig legs, moptop! When's the last time you were on a boat?" he chided Will. When he got no response, Quint's attention drifted to his next victim. "Yer highness is looking a little green around his gills and you haven't even left the dock! Hahaha! Want some Dramamine, boy'o?" Quint said to Hannibal later on.

Will's anger was at a low simmer for most of the morning, but it reached its boiling point while he was lashing four yellow barrels to the *Jonah's* deck.

"You call that a slip knot? Who taught you to tie a rope like that, moptop?"

Will whirled on Quint angrier than Hannibal had ever seen him at someone who was not guilty of murder. "Shut your mouth, Quint, or I'll hop on over there and shut it for you!" There was an unmistakable lilt and gruffness to Will's voice that sounded at home in the Deep South appearing all of a sudden and presumably without intent. It was clear to Hannibal who had taught Will that knot. Only a parent could produce that response in him.

Hannibal walked over to Will and put a hand on his shoulder. "Leave it, Will. That man is undeserving of your anger." Will shrugged Hannibal off. He folded under Quint's criticism and double checked his knots anyway to Hannibal's disappointment.

As they made their final preparations, Quint serenaded them with more insults and that dreadful song of his from atop the captain's deck of his boat. *"Farewell and adieu to you Spanish Ladies. Farewell and adieu, you ladies of Spain,"* he bellowed.

"Cast off will you? I can't take anymore of this," Will instructed and retreated to the wheelhouse.

Hannibal undid the knot and threw the line onto the dock.

“Yer going after that shark ain’t you? You ever been fishin’ before, yer highness?” Quint asked.

Hannibal shook his head. “No, but I do not see that we have much choice. The more experienced sailors seem *reluctant* to assist their neighbors for some reason,” he said eyeing Quint with a frown.

“You always have a choice: save them or don’t. What’s it to you if a few strangers get picked off by this fish?” Quint said as he swung down a ladder onto the lower deck of the *Orca* .

The *Jonah’s* engines started, and with Will otherwise preoccupied with their departure, Hannibal unbuttoned the top button of his person suit. He chafed at his confinement in all these small quarters: first the plane, then the car, now this boat. They were cages too small for a person of his appetites. Better to let a little out now in front of the town drunk then to let his guard slip in front of Jack’s prized profiler. “Nothing. It means nothing to me, but my companion sees the world differently,” he said and looked towards the cockpit.

“You two on yer honeymoon or somethin’?” Quint asked.

“No, we are with the FBI,” Hannibal explained and wished he had a set of fancy credentials like Will did to dramatically flash on occasions such as this.

“The boys from Washington,” Quint whistled, “my heroes, and here I thought you were a pair of soft-bellied Yanks after that pot o’gold. Well, maybe not *you.* Yer different than the other one I think, but not by much. ”

Two more buttons popped on the person suit. Hannibal gripped the railing of their boat and leaned towards Quint. “What do you mean by that, Mr. Quint?”

The *Jonah* had begun to pull away from the dock, but Quint stepped onto the gunwale and kept pace by walking along it towards the stern of his own boat. “Maybe nothin’, but I think there is somethin’ yer tryin’ to keep hid. Lecter is it? Tell me, Lecter, you ever serve?”

“No,” Hannibal said keeping his voice quiet and steady.

“Really?” Quint said from the stern of *the Orca.* “That surprises me. You have the look of a man who’s seen a lot of death in his life. You’ve got a shark’s eyes, yer highness.”

“I work with the FBI, and before that, I was a surgeon. I have seen my share. It is nothing remarkable.”

The *Jonah* turned towards the open sea at a glacial pace. Hannibal wished Will would hurry it up a little. Quint was actually starting to get to him. *Or maybe just his breath was.* Either way, Hannibal was eager to be away.

“Sure, sure. That’s as good an excuse as I ever did hear, but I think, that’s not everything. I think there’s something more to you—to the both of you's.”

“I think you have a drinking problem, Mr. Quint, and would urge you to see your physician about it before you do irreparable harm to your body,” Hannibal said with cold civility.

“Haha, I’ll do that, Doc. You take care of yourselves out there, you hear? Wouldn’t want you *nice* fellas to get ‘et up by that shark.”

“I always do,” Hannibal replied coldly.

…

The waters of the Georgian coastline were nothing like the northeast. They were far more opaque and tinged with the same rust colored mud that was everywhere down here.

“It’s because of the continental shelf,” Will explained, “it extends much farther out than it does in Virginia or Maryland.

“It smells funny,” Hannibal complained at Will’s side in the wheelhouse.

Will laughed and sniffed the air. “Then you’re really not going to like what comes next.”

“What do you mean?”

Will put the boat into neutral and motioned Hannibal to follow him onto the deck where he untied a 20 gallon trash bucket and dragged it towards the stern. “Okay, listen. I wish I could say I’m sorry, but that’s not how this goes. On a boat, everyone pitches in. Everyone does their part. You’ve got no experience and there’s not a lot I can trust you with yet.”

“I’m a quick study,” Hannibal said and shifted uncomfortably in his new Sperry Top-Siders. He could feel the balance of power had shifted between him and Will now that they were out on the ocean, and he did not like it.

“I know, and I’m gonna to teach you things, but for now I need you to man the chum line.”

“The what?”

The smile that Will wore was wicked. “The. Chum. Line,” he said bemused and lifted the top of the trash bucket.

The smell that rose up from the container knocked Hannibal back two paces. “What in Dante’s seven hells is that!?” he said covering his nose.

“Offal, mainly pork and a bit of albacore that I bought off a fisherman who couldn’t sell all of his catch yesterday. Waste not, want not!”

“Oh, but I wish you had,” Hannibal grumbled. “Wait. You spent the government’s money on all of this? I think I ought to report you to Jack,” he said revolted by the idea that anyone should have to pay for this “luxury.”

“Just giving back to the local economy!” Will chirped. “I want you to start ladlin’ the chum into the water until we build up a nice slick—about five miles will do. This little cocktail will

bring all the predators running, and if our shark is out there, it'll come find us."

"And where will you be," Hannibal asked archly as he received a large soup ladle from Will's hand.

"Baiting a few lines with some squid bait. If the shark is as big as I think it is, it won't do us much good, but at least we'll know he's in the area if he nips one of the baits off a line."

Hannibal looked heavenward after Will abandoned him and disappeared below deck to grab his fishing gear from the cabin. For the first time in his life, Hannibal considered asking for forgiveness, but the idea did not stick around for long. Dutifully, Hannibal resigned himself to his fate and did as he was instructed. Ladle after ladle of bone and blood went over the side of the *Jonah* while the tide pulled the ship into deeper water.

The dirty brown waters of the coast faded into a deep gunmetal grey. Gulls circled overhead occasionally diving into the slick to retrieve a floating piece of meat. Their white feathers came up red when they launched themselves back into the air. Despite the distracting smell at his feet, Hannibal was taken aback by the sheer beauty of the gulls at play. They were loud, discordant, and warred with one another over even the most inconsequential pieces of food. It was amazing how much humans had in common with the other vermin of the animal world.

"Okay, all done!" Will chimed as he finished tying the last line to the port side of the boat. "You want anything to drink? I'm grabbin' a beer." That southern twang clung to his tongue like honey, but shockingly Hannibal found that he did not mind the sound of it.

"It's barely noon," he said.

"You are turning down some daytime drinkin'? Hannibal Lecter, as I live and breathe," he said intentionally playing up the Southern charm. "What's the matter? Are you seasick?"

Hannibal frowned at the chum bucket. "By some miracle I am not."

Will laughed and tossed him a small plastic bottle three inches tall. "I'll go get the drinks. You can cap the chum bucket for now; we've got a good slick goin'. Wash up while I'm gone."

Hannibal looked at his blood stained hands and the bottle Will had thrown at him. '*Dial: Instant Hand Sanitizer,*' the label read. He may as well wash with battery acid. Hannibal groaned but cleaned himself up as best he could. Ugh, Will Graham was an utter brat. How much of this was being done to him on purpose? No matter. He would pay Will back for the damage done to his epidermis and cuticles later.

Will returned with a beer and the strangest cup Hannibal had ever seen. It looked like a child's cup—a sippy cup as he had heard them called—with a wine glass inside it.

"What is this?" he asked when Will handed him the glass.

There was a metallic hiss as Will popped the tab on his beer can and flung himself down into the fighting chair, which was bolted to the deck.

“I saw them at a gas station on the way in and bought you one as a thank you present for coming with me on this trip. It’s not a good idea to keep a lot of glass onboard a boat, and I figured you’d be too scandalized to drink wine out of a plastic solo cup so….surprise!”

“I--,” *‘I don’t believe you,’* he nearly said, but Will’s eyes stopped him from making the accusation. They did not twinkle like they usually did when he was up to mischief. Instead, his eyes were two bowls of clear blue glass brimming with childlike pleasure and pride. “That was...very considerate of you. Thank you,” Hannibal amended and was gratified to see Will attempt to hide a smile behind the lip of his beer can.

“First electric can openers then spill-proof wine glasses. What modern marvel will mankind think up next?” Will said.

“Hopefully shark repellent,” Hannibal said and took a sip of his chardonnay.

Will laughed. “Okay, now that one was actually funny.”

“A pity because I was only half-joking. What is your plan, Will? Surely you’ve never caught anything so large before.”

“You are correct. On my own, I caught a marlin once on vacation, but that's a fly in comparison to our fish here.”

“A vacation? You? Where does a man like Will Graham go on vacation?”

“Miami, but it didn't take. The fishing is just as good in Wolf Trap and I missed my dogs.”

“You do not catch marlins in Wolf Trap,” Hannibal pointed out.

“It’s not about the marlins,” Will grumbled but didn’t explain any further than that.

“You really should learn to relax more, Will, and be a little more selfish.”

“What do you call this?,” Will replied leaning back in the fighting chair and chugging his beer can to prove his point.

“I call it *‘following Jack’s orders’* .”

“I don’t get you, Doctor Lecter,” Will said and set his empty can down.

*‘Ding! Ding! Understatement of the century, dear boy,’* Hannibal thought. “What do you mean?”

“You’re Jack’s friend, but you don’t seem to like him very much as it pertains to me.”

“Your wellbeing is very much my concern. You’re my patient. Jack is my friend. The two are not mutually exclusive.”

“Oh,” Will said sullenly.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “You sound disappointed.”

“I’m not disappointed,” Will added quickly. *Too quickly?* “I’m getting another beer,” he said and launched himself out of the chair.

Hannibal grinned as Will walked away.

Will returned with the rest of the six pack dangling from his fingers and a new pair of sunglasses shadowing his eyes. He sat sideways in the fighting chair and draped one leg over the armrest. Will cracked open a second beer and took a sip. “Sorry, I didn’t ask if you wanted anything,” he said but with his glasses on, it was difficult to read his face for sincerity. “Do you want me to get up?”

“I’m fine,” Hannibal said and fell silent.

The ocean lapped at the boat while Hannibal sipped slowly at his wine. The day was hot and the wine was already much too warm, but he drank it anyway to fill the void.

Will said nothing. He might have been asleep for all Hannibal knew or perhaps having another hallucination. He sat motionless in the chair staring at the slick for the longest time; however, he must have been watching Hannibal out of the corner of his eye because as soon as Hannibal finished his glass, he piped up. “Are you sure you don’t want another one?”

Hannibal shook his head and secured his empty cup inside one of the *Jonah* ’s built-in cup holders beside the nearest fishing rod. “Drinking under a sun like this is as good a recipe as any for dehydration.”

“That’s why I'm drinking Coors,” Will said and shook the half empty can at him. “Mostly water.”

“And empty calories,”

Will shrugged and kept drinking.

“May I ask you a question?” Hannibal said as another silence threatened to overtake them. “It’s about earlier when we were talking about Jack, you--.”

Will sat up suddenly. “No,” he responded much to Hannibal’s surprise.

Not to be deterred, Hannibal folded his hands in his lap, crossed his legs, and radiated stubborn authority. “Will,” he scolded, “really now, I think it is important that we explore--,”

Will stuck his beer into his own cup holder and climbed out of the fighting chair. “No, not now,” he said. “Something’s takin’ the bait.”

Hannibal blinked and then heard the soft metallic creak of steel fishing line slowly feeding out of one of the reels. How had he missed that?

Will crept up on the rod and reel. His hand hovered over the break while he waited for some signal from the fish which Hannibal was deaf to.

“Ready to go fishin', Doctor Lecter?”

“What do you need me to do?” Hannibal said rising to his feet. A nervous, happy energy coiled in his belly. The thought that they might meet the shark was exhilarating.

Will motioned him over and moved aside when Hannibal got within arm’s reach.

“When it starts to run, I'll hit the break. Don’t start reelin' it in until you feel the line give a little. Save your strength, and let it exhaust itself.”

“You want ME to catch the shark!?” Hannibal exclaimed.

“It's not **the** shark.”

“How do you know?”

Will shrugged and adjusted Hannibal’s posture and position as if he were Will’s puppet. “I don’t, but it’s what my gut tells me. Call it fisherman’s intuition.”

Without warning, the line began to feed out at a hurried pace as the fish ran deep.

Will reached around Hannibal’s waist, hit the break, and guided Hannibal’s hands to the rod and reel. “Steady, steady,” Will said softly at Hannibal’s ear. “It’ll tire eventually.”

“Have you ever caught a shark?” Hannibal asked.

Will was quiet for a moment. “I’ve caught killers. Same difference,” he said and butted Hannibal with his shoulder. “Pay attention or he’ll get away.”

Eventually, Hannibal felt the line give a little just as Will said it would.

“Reel in the slack until the line grows taught again. Lean back if it’s easier. I won’t let you fall if you lose your balance,” Will said encouragingly.

Hannibal obeyed Will’s instructions and repeated the steps over and over again.

“Haul and lean,” Will hummed each time. “Haul and lean.”

Hannibal did slip once, but Will was right there to catch him as promised. His hands were around Hannibal’s hips even before Hannibal had fully lost his center. The interruption barely disrupted their rhythm. “Thank you,” Hannibal said.

“Certainly,” Will started to say and paused. Hannibal heard Will swallow hard. “What are friends for?”

It was the first time Will had called Hannibal a friend. ‘ *Took you long enough,’* Hannibal thought and smiled openly. “I am touched Will. Is that what you have been working up to all morning?”

“Oh shut up, Hannibal, and get the job done already. I’d have finished this ages ago.”

*Hannibal.*

Not Doctor Lecter.

*Hannibal.*

Five minutes later, Will walked to the side on the gunwale and looked overboard. “Hello, beautiful,” he said. “Want to see it?”

Hannibal walked over to the side of the ship and reeled in the line as he did. A very tired shark, 5ft in length paced beneath the surface of the water. It looked frightened and dirty beneath the cloudy water. Hannibal felt a little disappointed. After all that work, the shark looked as small and frail as any other creature.

Will slipped on some gloves he had hidden away in one of the pockets of his cargo shorts and plucked the fishing leader out of the water. With one hand, he hauled the shark halfway out of the water and cut the shark off the line with a pair of bolt cutters.

The shark thrashed on the surface for a moment and then bolted back into the deep.

“What kind of shark was it?” Hannibal asked.

“Just a little dusky shark...I think. We have them in Louisiana, but it’s been awhile since I've seen one,” Will said, putting away his gloves and gear.

“Did your father teach you to hunt sharks?”

“Haha, hunt them? Hannibal, we fish out here. You lure a fish. You don’t hunt them. It’s a different sport,” Will said and walked back to the fighting chair to retrieve his beer.

Hannibal stalked Will back to his seat making the chair swivel around to face him. “You are purposefully avoiding my question and artlessly so.”

“I...don’t want to talk about it right now. Can’t it wait until we’re back in Baltimore?”

“I don’t want to talk to you about it as your therapist, Will. I want to talk about it as your friend,” Hannibal said laying his hands on both arm rests and trapping Will in his seat.

Will shrank away from Hannibal as far as he was able to. “He did, but not like this. My father repaired boats, but he couldn’t afford one of his own.”

“How else do you catch a shark then?”

Will looked up and lifted his sunglasses so they sat on top of his head. “The same way you catch any killer,” he said in a tired voice, “on land.”

Hannibal looked into those serious eyes, which were as blue as the sea should be and wondered about the shadows that lurked inside them. There was something more here—something about his father Will was trying to avoid talking about. He stood up releasing Will

from his interrogation. “Come. I will make us lunch. I think we have both earned a rather large fare.”

“Haha, I barely did anything.”

Hannibal narrowed his eyes and feigned a severe scowl, which he could tell Will saw through in an instant. “How right you are, Will. Very well. I’ll make you a small salad instead. It is what you deserve.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27!

If you've never seen a wine sippy cup, I'd like you to bask in the majesty of this wonder! Hannibal might not appreciate it now, but his quality of living has just drastically improved. I expect Bedelia will be getting a dozen of them for Christmas.

# Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?

Chapter Summary

Back at port, a meeting with Captain Quint turns violent, and Will isn't the only one in trouble. This fishing trip is having an interesting effect on the young profiler and Hannibal better start watching his own back. Will's mind is beginning to make several odd and interesting connections, which could spell trouble for Hannibal and his carefully laid plans.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The men returned before sundown, empty-handed and irritable. They *could* have gotten more fishing in. There were still three more hours of sunlight available to them, but Will knew better. The signs were clear: a growing testiness, pink skin, and an absence of sweat on his brow. Hannibal had been in the sun too long and that soft Northern European skin of his had felt every second of it so Will had made the decision and turned for port.

They tied off and packed up their gear. Will suggested that Hannibal go lay down or fix himself some dinner. “I have errands to run in town. Don’t worry about feeding me,” Will said.

“I worry. God knows what sort of trash you will suck up if left to your own devices,” Hannibal fussed.

“Look, just because you hated the biscuits at Cracker Barrel doesn't mean we all have to suffer.”

“Will,” Hannibal said growling his name. Oh, he was going to be a delight in the morning.

“I'll be fine. If I stop for food I promise to eat something that would pass muster.”

“You don’t have many options in this town,” Hannibal grumbled.

Will sighed and rubbed his face, which felt both raw and wind chafed. “Then save me a bit of whatever you’re having and please go lay down.”

Hannibal sniffed and stiffly turned away.

*‘He’ll know what’s what when he tries to take off that shirt,’* Will thought as he watched Hannibal's head disappear below deck. He smirked imagining the scene. Hannibal Lecter with a farmer’s tan…wouldn't Freddie Lounds just love a picture of that for *Tattle Crime*— Beverly and the rest of the forensics team too.

Will retrieved his wallet from the wheelhouse and left his gun behind. He jumped down onto the deck and wobbled a little on landing.

His first stop was the drug store for some aloe and another case of beer. Then it was off to the tack shop to buy Hannibal his own fishing knife since every good fisherman should have one. Will selected a bone handled knife, which he thought would suit Hannibal's gothic aesthetic. It was simple, sharp, and more expensive than he had planned on spending with the government's dollar so he charged the knife to his own card justifying the cost by thinking of it as a gift although didn't think he'd tell Hannibal about that last part. Gift giving was something done between intimate friends. He and Hannibal...they weren't that. They definitely weren't that.

Next, he stopped at one of those boardwalk souvenir shops to buy his friend a more sensible outfit for tomorrow. Will tried to find the most fashion forward ensemble he could manage between the store's limited selection and his own tragically underdeveloped sense of style. He settled for a bucket hat and a cotton button up with a little palm tree embroidered on the pocket that was looser and more breathable than the fitted crew top Hannibal had worn today. There had been a brief moment, only a brief one because he knew he'd been killed for it, that Will had considered buying the blue shirt with the dogs all over it. It appealed to him for obvious reasons, but he knew there was no way he'd ever get Hannibal to wear it.

With his purchases made, Will headed back to the *Jonah,* but his progress was impeded by a familiar phantom that crossed his path. It was as large as a truck and as unwelcome as a black cat. The Ravenstag huffed at him only three car lengths away. "You again," Will said and then mentally kicked himself. *'Don't start talking to the figments of your imagination. Just because you're crazy doesn't mean you have to act crazy too.'*

The Ravenstag ignored Will after gaining his attention and stared at a noisy restaurant across the street.

Will followed its gaze and looked up at the marquee above the lintel. 'The Black Dog, Food and Spirits' it read. Did the stag want him to go inside? *'Of course not. It's not real, idiot.'* Regardless, the bar tugged at him in the way a crime scene did, and Will followed his curiosity to the front door where he collided with a man clutching a broken nose as he stumbled onto the street.

"Are you okay?" Will asked, but the man kept walking, and Will noticed that the Ravenstag was gone too.

Inside the bar, several voices were raised in anger, but one rang as clear as a boson's whistle. "Don't tell me my business! None of you bastards has half as much courage or knowledge as ol' Quint here. None!" Quint hollered.

Will strode through the door itching for something. He wasn't sure if it was a fight he wanted or if it was just a means to be useful. He and Hannibal hadn't even glimpsed a shark after the dusky, not even a little blacktip. Will walked through the door and set his bags down in the nearest empty chair to free his hands. "Is there a problem here, Quint?" he said and flashed his badge.

Quint laughed. “No, no. Not in the slightest, moptop. I was just tellin’ these fine folk here that **they’re full of fuckin’ horseshit!”** Quint said, and his face twisted into a vicious snarl like a man possessed.

A bottle sailed across the room and shattered against the dart board behind Quint’s head. It was chaos after that.

Two men jumped Quint prompting Will to intercede before the old drunkard got himself seriously hurt.

Realizing that Will had entered the fight on Quint’s side, two more men jumped into the fray. As the smallest of the litter, Will was pitched out of the dogpile within thirty seconds and slammed into the back of another man who had been peacefully kicking back a Bud up until that moment. Needless to say, he was not a happy customer.

Two of the good ol’ boys from the pile broke away and now Will had his very own three-on-one situation to deal with. Perfect. Today was going great.

Instinctively, Will reached for his sidearm forgetting that he’d left it on the boat, and took a right hook to the face for his trouble. The blow spun him around and sent him to the floor. Will thought about the knife in his pocket and what he could do with it as he licked blood and sawdust off his lips. But before he could draw his bone handled knife, he noticed Quint staring down at him through the forest of Levi jeans.

Quint held in his hand the neck of a broken bottle, which dripped beer and blood onto the ground beneath his feet. Filled with the thrill of battle, Quint looked like a younger man in both posture and presence; however, the same could not be said of his eyes, which had aged several centuries in the span of minutes. In that moment, Will saw him clearly. Physically, Quint wore his life of hard labor, poor nutrition, and alcohol abuse like one of Hannibal’s carefully tailored suits. He was younger and in better shape than he first appeared, but in spirit Quint was something else entirely. Had he been born a generation or earlier, Quint might have found fame on some foreign battlefield where his savagery could have been turned towards some noble purpose, but in modern times, he was merely dangerous, a saber tooth trapped by the meager opportunities afforded to him in this age

“Thanks for the help, moptop, but we locals like to settle things in our own way. Nighty night now.” Quint smiled.

Before Will could react something hard struck him in the back of the head. Then the world tilted and went dark.

…

Will sat in Hannibal’s dining room alone pondering for the umpteenth time what would possess Hannibal to hang that picture with the swans in the one room where it was sure to draw the most attention with the amount of entertaining he did. Will suspected that Hannibal liked to cause mischief more than he let on and asking about it would be playing right into his game so Will kept silent and tried not to think too hard about the painting or whatever it was he was about to eat. Whatever Hannibal was cooking tonight smelled horrible. It smelled like

cat vomit. No, it smelled *worse* than cat vomit. Will wondered if it was too late to sneak out. '*Sorry, Doctor Lecter. Got to go! Jack just called. A body's just turned up in the octopus tank at the aquarium and he wants me to have a look at it. You know how that goes. That damn, Jack. Rain check?'* Actually, forget the rain check. Hannibal might actually hold him to it.

No jury in the world would convict him, but Will couldn't shake the feeling that Hannibal would be upset. Will didn't want to be the cause of that. Hannibal was too good to him to do that to. Fuck. Cat vomit it was then. Bon appétit.

"How's it going in there?" Will called to the kitchen, but there was no answer. "Hannibal?" Still his host ignored him.

Will slid his chair away from the table forgetting how persnickety Hannibal was about the hardwood. He froze and when no complaint from the adjoining room was uttered, Will continued to rise before heading for the kitchen.

But the kitchen was empty too.

The lights were off and it was colder than usual. Unease scratched at the base of Will's spine. He knew this wasn't right. Hannibal's kitchen was always warm and filled with his energy. Something was **terribly** wrong.

A single pot sat on the stove boiling over. Will walked over to the the stove and shut it off shocked that Hannibal would leave one of his masterworks unattended. What was Hannibal up to? Was he okay?

Will peered into the pot, but an opaque layer of white foam lay on top obscured the meal from view. It looked like the bone broth Will made for the rescue dogs that were too weak to eat solid food. Why was Hannibal making bone broth for dinner? Where was the rest of the meal? Where was Hannibal for that matter?

"Hannibal!?" Will called out, louder this time. "Where are you!?"

Will stirred the broth with a ladled and felt something large and hard kicking around the bottom of the pot. He hooked the object inside the well of the ladle and brought the object to the surface. When the steam cleared, Will was looking at the large pearlescent tooth of a great white shark. "HANNIBAL!?"

*"Would you shut the hell up, moptop! You'd wake the devil with that cursed yammerin' of yours,"* a gruff heavily accented voice that was not Hannibal's answered.

...

Will woke with a throbbing headache on top of a four inch thick mattress made mostly out of springs instead of padding. Will sat up and shook head until his vision cleared. He was in a one room cell as cold and dark as Hannibal's imagined kitchen. The vomit smell, which he had incorrectly attributed to their meal in his dream, actually came from one of the corners of the cell. "I'm in holding," Will said aloud because he was too shocked for anything else.

“Yeah, no shit, Sherlock. Guess that's why the FBI hired you. Can’t tell you how glad I am to see my tax dollars at work.” Quint said from the cell across from Will's.

“But **why** am I in holding? What did you tell them Quint?” Will snapped sure that this was Quint's fault.

“Nothing. Chiefy came by and slapped some cuffs on me. Then she tells Buck to pick you up, nice and peaceful like, and carry you down here, but I tell you, I ain’t never seen her look angrier. I’d watch yourself around her, moptop.”

“ME?! What did I do?”

“Don’t know. Disturbing the peace be my guess. Remember what I said to you earlier? We locals have our own way of dealing things. Yous best stay out of them.”

“I'm trying to help.”

“Then help and get gone. Mayor’s on her case. Voters up in arms. Hell, I can’t imagine them preacher men are too happy seeing their flock get ‘et up by that shark. If you fail. She fails harder. Now think about how it must have looked seeing you sprawled in a heap getting beat up by them good-for-nothings. Ain’t nobody got it harder than chiefy. Not you. Not even ol’Quint.”

Will thought about it and fell silent. He hadn't really considered about Brody's position in all of this. On one side, she faced an adversarial group of councilmen and business owners fearing for their livelihoods more than their lives, and on the other, there was an ambivalent force of nature that could not be guarded against without sacrificing the town's prosperity. And here Will was cruising souvenir shops and getting into bar fights...

*'Way to go, Graham. You’re a real credit to the Bureau.’*

At some point during his recriminations, Will had begun to pace.

“What’s eatin’ you, moptop? At the rate yer worryin’ a hole in yer stomach that shark’s not gonna have the chance to get **you**,”

“Why didn't you tell Brody I was trying to help you?” Will asked.

“Cause I think yer a smug, arrogant asshole that’s why. Who told you I wanted yer help?”

“You were outnumbered!”

“Mind your own business, moptop and ol’ Quint will mind his.”

Will walked towards the door of his cell and wrapped his hands around two iron bars. “I know yer...your type, Quint," he said watching his accent closely. Quint was able to draw it out of him like nothing else since Will had left Louisiana, but Will wasn't about to let him have any more reason to feel smug. "You’re not fooling me with this tough talk.”

“Oh yeah? Go on. Educate me with that fancy Washington thinking they filled your head with at the F…B...I,” he said punctuating each letter of the acronym.”

Will cleared his throat. He didn’t usually like to do this, psychoanalyze people who were not killers. It felt rud but so was Quint, and this asshole deserved to be knocked down a peg. “You make an adequate living; you’re too smart not to. If you see an opportunity to pocket a little extra cash, you seize it and to hell with the collateral damage. But you’ve got a drinking problem and maybe more so you piss it all way before you have a chance to enjoy it in any material way. I bet the addiction runs in your family too and that only makes you madder as you watch your fortune slip through your fingers. It’s never your fault, Quint. There’s always someone else to blame.”

“Shit, I could have told you that much. About anyone. Have you smelled me lately? Of course I got a drinkin’ problem.”

But Will wasn’t done. “You lost someone to the same addiction. The only someone that you ever cared about, or cared about you. It was a while ago. You’re about the same age that they were when they passed was. Was it a parent? Grandparent? You’re afraid your bill’s going to come due before you can cash in your chips. It's going to be bad and it's going to hurt, Quint. You're frightened.

Quint lifted the icepack to his swollen eye and said nothing at first.

Will tightened his grip on the bars and glared at Quint willing him to deny it. Will had plenty more where that came from.

“Maybe yer not as dumb as you look. They teach you all that in Washington?”

“I didn't learn it in the FBI, you shit-eating old salt. I learned it in the same dirty boat yards and backwater bars as you did.”

“Ohhhh, you don’t say?” Quint chuckled. “Well that changes everything. Don’t it, **brother** ?”

“Not really.”

Quint rolled over onto his side to look at Will and smiled a big, gap-toothed grin. “I thought I heard something of an accent in yer voice earlier. It’s gone now. Why is that I wonder? Is it cause that fight back there reminded you of home? Did it get yer blood all hot? Well, let me tell you something, **brother**. *Y*ou think yer so smart, but look at where you ended up. Folks like us? We only go one place, straight down the shitter!”

“I'm nothing like you,” Will said.

“Sure you are. Sure you are, moptop. Hunt as many sharks as I have and you become like a shark, brother, and I smell **blood** on you.”

Will glared back defiantly, but Quint’s words had gotten their hooks in him. Will did have blood on him, a lot of it. While he could wash it off physically, his memories were perpetually stained red.

A loud buzzing sound bounced off the concrete walls followed by the heavy clank of a metal door at the end of the hallway. Will heard the light tapping of wood soled shoes on the concrete floor and braced himself for what was coming.

A red-faced Hannibal moved into view wearing a brown suit and heather-gray vest that did not clash too badly with his sunburn. Will suspected this might be intentional.

“Good evening, Will,” he said

Will stood at the bars holding onto them for support. He wanted to run. He wanted to hide. But prison cells were designed to make either impossible. He didn’t like Hannibal seeing him like this, behind bars. It was embarrassing. “I’m not so sure *‘good’* is the right adjective here.”

Hannibal regarded him with worry and regret in his eyes. “I have not kept my promise to you,” he said and grabbed the bars above Will’s hands. “I said I would protect you from this. I am so sorry, Will.”

Will stepped away from the bars. And now he'd made Hannibal feel bad because he had tried to do the right thing and failed, dammit. Could this day get any worse? “Don’t be so dramatic. It’s not your fault,” he said and shoved his hands into his pockets. "Brody probably just put me in the brig because I got knocked out and she didn’t know what else to do with me,” Will said and wondered about his own reasoning. It made sense to lay an unconscious man down on whatever bed was available, but why did she lock him up? “Bust me out already. I know you have the keys. I could hear them jingling in your pocket. Why are you here anyway? Shouldn’t that be Brody’s job?”

Hannibal reached into his coat and produced a set of keys from an inside pockedt. Then he popped the door open with the one tagged with a green dot. “I was concerned about how this experience would affect you given your fears about these places. Chief Brody graciously allowed me to see you first to assess your mental state, but she would like to speak with you upstairs before we leave,” Hannibal said as he handed the keys to Will.

Will let the implication concerning his mental health go. Brody was a much greater worry. “Did she look mad?”

Hannibal quirked his head ten degrees to the left. “Should she be?”

Will stared dubiously over his shoulder into Quint’s cell, but the other inmate had rolled onto his side and lay with his back to both him and Hannibal. If Quint had any other "sage" advice to trade he kept them to himself in front of Hannibal.

“I don’t know, but I bet I'm about to find out.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27. I hope you enjoyed that Spacedogs nod!

# Brody

Chapter Summary

Will and Police Chief Brody have a heart-to-heart, and Will learns that small town politics can be as dangerous as shark infested waters.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Brody sat in the dark of her office clicking away at her computer at a tempo that made Will ill at ease.

“You wanted to see me, Chief?”

“You’ve had a busy night,” she said from her desk. Her tone brought the temperature of the room down three degrees.

“Yeah. Sorry about that,” Will said and stuck his thumbs through his belt loops.

“How did it go today?”

“We didn’t catch anything large enough to be our shark,” he answered.

“That’s too bad. Guess it was too much to hope we’d get lucky,” She leaned back in her chair and looked Will over. He knew that look. He’d seen it often enough on the faces of Jack and his colleagues on the forensics team whenever he popped off at the wrong moment or showed up to work looking like roadkill after another sleepless night. Brody’s desire to trust him warred with the image she saw before her. Will certainly didn't look the part of the hero. That was Hannibal or it was Jack. It was **never** Will.

“Something else on your mind?” he asked.

“A lot of things actually. The city council wants to open the beaches next weekend if no more bodies wash up.” Brody said and tapped a fist against her forehead. “They’re so stupid!”

“That seems reckless. What makes them think there won’t be more bodies?”

“I don’t know,” Brody said with a sigh. “Optimism? Blind faith? The imminent threat of economic collapse? Take your pick. But the important thing is that they can’t do it without my signoff. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about.”

“The City Council?”

“No. *You*. I want to talk about why the FBI sent *you* because I'm starting to think maybe this is all some elaborate set up to discredit me. I’m sorry if that sounds harsh.”

Will raised an eyebrow, “All because of a bar fight?”

Brody shook her head. “No, but I'm not happy about that either. Look, I didn't ask for your help. I appreciate it, but I didn’t dream that our little shark problem would require the assistance of the FBI.”

“I was told we were invited.”

“Yeah, you were, but that wasn’t my call. The Mayor mandated it. He said could get me some help on this from the outside. Said he had a friend in the Governor’s office with a direct line to Washington. Next thing I know I’m on the phone with your boys in D.C. feeling like a fish out of water. So I'll ask again, why did they send *you*?”

“My case record is one of the best in the FBI,” Will answered with a shrug. *‘Or maybe Jack just wanted to get rid of me.’*

“You’re Jack Crawford’s Closer,” she said, “I knew that, but there were things the Bureau didn’t tell me about--things that I’m hoping you have a better answer for.” Brody clicked something on her computer screen and turned her monitor for Will to see.

Will recognized *TattleCrime’s* masthead and could not hide his disgust when he read the title of the article: '*It Takes One*', Freddie’s first major hit piece on him, which had nearly cost Abigail her life at the hands of Eldon Stammets. “Tabloid journalism, Chief? Is that what passes for good detective work in this town,” he sneered.

“It’s not my only source, but it's the one I want to talk about right now,” Brody said ignoring Will’s bait. "*The FBI isn’t just hunting psychopaths, they’re headhunting them too offering them competitive pay and benefits in the hopes of using one demented mind to catch another,"* she read aloud. “How much of this is true?”

“It’s about context,” he said.

“It’s about perception, Mr. Graham. You don’t know what I'm dealing with right now, and this is the kind of talk that tips scales in the wrong direction,” she said as she rubbed the bridge of her nose. “If you are working with this department then you represent me. I need to know who I’m dealing with, and I don’t have time to sit around a campfire playing twenty questions with you.”

Will looked at Brody and noticed for the first time the wrinkles in her uniform and dark circles beneath her eyes. She looked tired and worried, and if not for Freddie’s article empathy might have moved Will to take a softer approach. “You’ve got a man-eating shark on the loose and a constituency that’s about as bloodthirsty as the beast. I get the picture, but that doesn't give you the right to accuse me of...what are you accusing me of, Chief?”

“I'm not accusing you of anything, Mr. Graham. I'm looking for a reason to trust you because if this goes badly I'm the one with the hook in my mouth. In the eyes of the township, I’m the one who brought you in. You’ve got to admit, the Internet paints a pretty grim picture,” she explained.

Will crossed arms in front of his chest. “What exactly do you need to hear?”

“My credit is almost maxed out with the City Council. All they need is one excuse not to trust me. If anyone finds out about you…,”

“...being a psychopath?” Will prompted. “Yeah, I’m sure that’ll go over great during the next election. Never mind that Freddie Lounds printed her journalism degree off the Internet.”

“For the record, I don’t think you’re a psychopath, but I can’t explain what you do. It reads like comic book hero stuff. You get that, right? How superhuman you sound in print?”

“I'm not sure we read the same article. Freddie likes to cast me as the villain in most of her stories.”

Brody slicked her bangs out of her face and sighed. “Give me a break, please? I apologize if you find this insulting, but I've got a job to do. It’s my duty, Will. Surely you can understand that from one badge to another.”

*‘It’s my duty.’* Those words did more to assuage Will’s anger than her apology. Will thought about what Quint had told him in holding, and about what Hannibal would say about his behavior if he were in the room observing. It certainly wouldn't be approval. *‘Who are you really angry with, Will?’* his psychiatrist’s voice asked inside his mind. The answer was Freddie, but Freddie wasn’t here and Brody didn't deserve to be her substitute. Brody was a cop like Will had been before he got shot. She had a duty to protect the town and saw Will was a threat to that. Was it fair to blame her for his insecurities?

Will removed his glasses from a side pocket. “What I do isn't magic. It’s science and psychology. I examine the evidence and build a psychological profile,” he said as he cleaned the lenses, but he could sense that Brody wasn’t satisfied. Will slipped his glasses on and studied the police chief. What did she need to hear to make her trust him? “I'm a good fisherman,” he said at last.

His answer caught her off guard and who could blame her? “They have sharks in Washington?” she asked skeptically.

“They have politicians,” Will smirked.

Brody snorted. “Ain’t that the truth, but a senator is not a maneater.”

“I know how to catch sharks, Chief Brody. I didn't grow up in Washington. I was raised by my dad in Biloxi and Greenville.”

“And what? Caught sharks for a living?”

This is where it got tricky and required some finessing of the truth.

“He repaired boats and fished for sharks and other things on his days off."

“Some species are illegal.”

“We released them” he said, *‘We released them...usually.’*

Brody appeared to swallow his story. “What is Doctor Lecter to you?” she asked next.

Will paused. What was Hannibal to him? Friend? Psychiatrist? Colleague? Could someone be all three without a conflict of interest or would Will have to choose one someday? His stomach clenched at the thought. “He is my medical consultant on this trip,” he said carefully.

The creases around Brody’s eyes eased as her suspicions were allayed. A federal agent of questionable stability couldn't be trusted, but a good southern boy...that was another story. He wouldn't spin yarns to make himself look better for the capital city brass. He would do his duty by the townsfolk. That was the fiction anyway, which she had clearly chosen to believe. “That does make me feel better. Promise me you’ll stay out of dust-ups like tonight and keep a low profile until this is all over. Maybe no one will get to know you well enough to start digging into your past.”

Will stuck his hands in his pockets and shrugged. “I’ll keep out of trouble, but if you think we’ll be able to keep a low profile with Doctor Lecter doing all the errands then I think you’ll be disappointed.”

“We do have Fresh Direct down here,” Brody said with a wry smile. “I’ll even give you my password.”

They both laughed. Despite their rocky start, he was starting to like Brody. She reminded him a little of Bev. “Do you need anything else or can I get going before Doctor Lecter tries to redecorate your lobby?”

“No, I got what I needed. You can go. Your stuff is on the floor by the door."

Will glanced at the clock. It was a quarter to nine. "You're working rather late aren't you?"

"I need to finish this paperwork and get home before my husband sends out a search party.”

Will looked at the stacks of paper on either corner of the desk. "That's an awful lot of paperwork for a small southern town."

Brody sighed. "That's what an epidemic of methamphetamines gets you. When the economy turned sour during the drought, a lot of folks started cooking, and because of our location and lack of resources, dealing turned into a thriving export business. I know a lot of the fishermen smuggle the shit out of the town, but for every one I catch, two more get recruited.

"That's awful. I'm sorry."

"That's life. Deal with your shark, Will. I'll deal with mine," she said dismissively.

...

Will left Brody's office with all his belongings and found Hannibal sitting his with legs crossed playing Candy Crush of all things.

"Really?" Will said derisively.

"My former secretary introduced me to it," Hannibal replied without looking up from his frantic swiping. "I have never quite forgiven her for that."

"Is this the one that fled to Europe?"

"The very same," Hannibal said with smug smile that was at odds with the annoyance in his voice. "I only wish she had done it sooner before she ruined me for life."

"Well pack it up, Pinball Wizard. I'm starving."

Hannibal sighed and closed out of the app. "I beg your forgiveness. I prepared some sole for us but had not anticipated this detour. I am not sure how the fish will taste after resting for so long," he said buttoning up his jacket.

"I'm sure it'll taste fine," Will assured him as they walked out together: Will in his cargo shorts and boat shoes and Hannibal wearing a custom suit made by his own tailor. They could not have made a more absurd pair. "Aren't you hot?" he asked.

"Almost unbearably so."

"Suffering for the sake of your art?"

Hannibal gave him a sly, sidelong look. "All the great ones do."

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by @WolfTrapQueen27! <3

# Georgia on My Mind

Chapter Summary

No one ever said fishing was easy especially when your prey is the world's fiercest predator. It's been one week since their arrival, and Will and Hannibal have nothing to show for their efforts. Well, maybe not NOTHING. Will and Hannibal have certainly become a lot closer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the sun set, it blanketed the ocean with a coat of red paint. Will sat on the transom of the boat dangling his feet in the water. Many yards off, Alana swam in a wide circle. Her arrival in Georgia had been a surprise: one that was appreciated but not entirely welcomed.

It had been almost a week since he and Hannibal had gone looking for Moby Dick, and Will felt himself already much changed by the experience. Georgia was not Louisiana, but it was close enough to affect a difference in his mannerisms and thought patterns. He felt sharp around the edges and as taut as an eighty pound bow. Hannibal had surely noticed it. Alana would too soon enough. Did Will want them to see? The answer was both a yes and no. He liked that he felt almost like the man who had killed Garret Jacob Hobbes without having to shoot anyone. Maybe this was the man he needed to be to catch both the shark and the Chesapeake Ripper, but there would be a cost. There always was.

It was hot and quiet except for the churn of the ocean and the erratic splashing Alana made as she moved through it. Her milk white arms dipped in and out of the sanguinary salt water as she swam. Will watched and thought about how different her hands were from Hannibal's as they tucked Will into bed every night out of concern for his safety. His friends. Usually it was the friends and family that paid a price. Will had had a family once...sort of. He'd had a mother. *She left.* He'd had a father. *He...died.* They were safe from him, but his friends...

"Looks like I didn't escape after all, Dad," Will said as he dipped his hand into the water. He expected his skin to come up red, but the water remained clear in his hands. That didn't seem right. His hands *shouldn't* be clean. Will shivered despite what the sweat soaked shirt suggested about the temperature, which meant his fever was back. Damn. Will removed his shirt and wiped his face on it. He left it sitting on the deck when he was done.

A large splash off the port side drew his attention away. He stood and hopped back onto the deck to investigate; but whatever had caused the noise had already slipped back beneath the surface by the time he reached the gunwale. Only a cloud of white sea foam and a black, oily slick remained on top of the water. Will didn't want to believe what he was seeing, but there

was no denying it. The air was thick with the corrosive smell of salt and copper. That was blood, not oil, that bobbed on the waves and licked the hull of the boat—a lot of blood.

“ALANA’” Will shouted and scrambled for the stern. “Get out of the water!”

Alana looked at him and laughed, but she swam for the boat.

“Hurry! Hurry!” Will urged her and leaned over the side extending his hand as far as he could reach.  How could he be so stupid? Why had he let her go swimming!?

Behind Alana a black fin broke the surface of the water with a hiss.

“Alana!” Will cried in anguish. She was almost within reach, but the shark was closing in on her rapidly. Too rapidly. One didn't need to be a profiler to know what was about to happen.

Alana glanced back over her shoulder and screamed.

“Don’t look back! Keep swimming!” Will pleaded. “Alana! Keep swimming!”

The fin loomed large behind her, but at the moment that all looked lost, it sank beneath the surface and disappeared.

Alana reached the boat in time and grabbed Will’s hand. He tried to pull her on board but struggled. She was dead weight in his arms.

When she was halfway out of the water, Will received his second start of the day. Alana was…

Alana was not all there.

From the waist down, she had a fish tail!

Will yelped and fell backwards pulling Alana with him into the boat. The back of his head struck the fiberglass deck with an audible thud as man and mermaid fell. The blow to his head made his vision go dark for a moment.

“Alana?” Will whispered as he tried to push her off. His hands closed on well-muscled forearms that were less easily moved than boulders. Will blinked, and as his vision cleared he saw that it was Hannibal, not Alana, who lay on top of him.

His hair was longer and tied back with a clam shell, but that wasn't the oddest thing. Will’s eyes travelled from his face, down his bare chest, and paused when they reached his round stomach. Like Alana, Hannibal was not totally human either. “This can’t be real,” Will said and brushed the rough skin beneath Hannibal’s navel as it faded into his animal half.

Hannibal tilted his head back and made a pleased rumble in the back of his throat.

Will pushed up onto his elbows and peered around Hannibal’s torso. Unlike Alana, Hannibal’s other half differed from the classic imagery of merfolk. His skin was the matte grey of shark skin, and he possessed the dorsal fin to match.

Fascination triumphed over fear. Will reached around Hannibal's waist and laid the palm of his hand on Hannibal's back above the fin before he could think better of it.

Hannibal looked down at him with black and unreadable eyes, which lacked their usual spark of cunning intellect.

Will's hand inched slowly down Hannibal's spine until his fingers touched the hard cartilage of the dorsal fin where it rose out of Hannibal's back like the tip of blade.

Hannibal made that noise again and squirmed on top of Will. The sudden movement did something to Will—something he'd never thought Hannibal Lecter could make him feel. Will shivered as the sensation rolled through him and then abated while his grip tightened on the fin.

Hannibal put his hands on Will's shoulders and pressed him back onto the deck. He rolled his hips against Will's crotch building friction between their bodies.

"Wait! Hannibal! Stop!" Will blushed and tried to wriggle out from underneath the creature, which only made the matter worse. His face felt like it was on fire although he could not be sure whether that heat was from embarrassment or some other place.

But Hannibal held firm and leaned down to trill  a note against Will's throat. His voice was airy and low like an alto flute. Will could not help but answer him with a licentious moan of his own.

His hands found purchase on Hannibal's sharp pelvic bones. In the beginning, Will pushed back when Hannibal thrust himself forward and fought to get out from under him, but eventually he found that rhythm interrupted by another desire—one that told him not to pull away. This was absurd. Two days ago he could barely call Hannibal by his first name. Now he was rutting against him like a feral animal. But God, it felt good.

"Stop," Will said mostly to himself since it was clear that Hannibal had no intention of stopping. "We've got to stop! I don't want this," he lied.

Hannibal let up and grew very still. The creature gazed down at Will with dead, black eyes like a doll's and smiled, revealing a perfect row of sharp teeth. Was he upset? Who could say? This wasn't the Hannibal Will knew. He looked wane and skeletal in the twilight.  Gone too was the fastidious nature and artistic spirit Will admired in his friend.  This wasn't Hannibal at all. This was what remained of a body after the soul had departed. It was disturbing and beautiful to behold.

The fake Hannibal leaned down as if to kiss him, but it wasn't a kiss, which Not Hannibal gave Will. It was his teeth.

…

Will woke up screaming and thrashing while a pair of familiar hands held him down.

“Let me go! Let me go!” Will hollered and struggled against his restraints. He could still feel Hannibal’s teeth in his throat, ripping and licking the torn muscle.

“Then stop carrying on like this before you hurt yourself!” Hannibal, the real Hannibal, scolded.

When Will quieted, he backed off, and reality came back into sharp focus.

They were below deck and Hannibal was seated at the edge of Will’s bed examining him. Hannibal was bare to the waist and although he had probably just rolled out of bed, his hair was already perfect. That much exposed skin reminded Will of his dream and the erection between his legs. Will prayed Hannibal did not notice the tent beneath the bed sheets.

“Are you alright?” Hannibal asked.

Will rolled onto his side hoping to better conceal the erection. “Bad dreams.”

“They must not have been *all* bad,” Hannibal said and smiled with his eyes.

‘*Fuck. He knows.’*

If Will could have sunk the boat with his thoughts and gone down with the ship he’d have done it. Instead he turned his head and groaned into his pillow.

Hannibal gave up on subtlety and laughed outright. “Worry not, dear Will. I assure you, I have seen all you have to offer and more in my years of practicing medicine. Can I get you anything? Water perhaps?”

“How about a little privacy?” Will grumbled while debating whether he should be offended by the *‘and more’* comment or not.

“Of course. I will just take my coffee above deck and watch the sunrise. Would you like the handcuffs on or off for this?” Hannibal said as cool as if he was asking for the time.

It was the last straw. Will hurled his pillow at Hannibal’s face, but Hannibal blocked it. He set the pillow back down beneath Will’s head and stood up. “I am sorry to tease,” he said and retrieved the key from his own nightstand. “The puritanical values of American culture are so absurd to me that I cannot help myself at times. It is different where I come from.”

“Try, *Doctor Lecter*. Try. Your level. **Best.**"

Hannibal made no promises as he unlocked the handcuff around Will’s wrist. “You have nothing to be ashamed of, Will. There is nothing more natural than arousal and desire.”

Will rolled away from Hannibal as soon as he was free and curled up into a ball beneath the blankets. “Go away.”

He heard Hannibal move towards the door. “Join me after you are finished. I will leave a cup of coffee on the counter for you.”

Will refused to respond. With any luck, maybe Hannibal would fall overboard and drown while he was up there.

…

Hannibal was unfortunately still in one piece and as cheerful as a tulip when Will finally joined him on deck, and he was **not** alone. Three corgis attended to Hannibal like ladies in waiting.

“Good morning, Will. Come meet our new friends. This is Whiskey, Sherry, and Bee.”

The dogs turned their attention to Will and abandoned Hannibal without a second thought.

Will knelt down to greet them on their level. They were young dogs and immaculately groomed. “This one’s collar says its name is Spot,” Will said.

“I know, and it's a terrible name for the animal. Do you see a single spot on it?”

Will looked the dog over and had to agree, but he was still feeling surly towards Hannibal for earlier. “You can’t just rename other people’s dogs,” he growled.

“You do it all the time,” Hannibal countered.

“They were strays, and now they’re mine. I can do what I want,” Will said defensively. “Who do these dogs belong to?”

“Mayor Vaughn. He dropped by to say hello, but he was called away a moment ago. I offered to watch the dogs while he handled his business because I thought you might like to play with them after you had handled yours.”

Will flushed. “New house rule: we never talk about this morning **again**.”

Hannibal tapped his index finger against his knee. “I cannot make that promise, Will. We have not touched upon the topics of intimacy and arousal in our sessions together, but i we really should discuss why you are so embarrassed about it.”

“No,” Will insisted.

“I suppose I can wait until we are back at home in more familiar settings if that will put you at ease.”

“NO!”

Hannibal pursed his lips in a manner that suggested annoyance. “Don’t be unreasonable, Will.”

“Don’t be an ass!” Will said, and buried his face in Whiskey’s fluffy coat.

“Ah, look! Mayor Vaughn is back.” Hannibal said.

Will looked up and saw the mayor emerging from the wheelhouse of the *Orca*. He and Quint spoke in low voices as they shook hands and exchanged friendly smiles.

“Looks like Quint is going to get his big payday. The town must be getting desperate,” Will said.

Despite his mayoral business attire and dress suit, Vaughn hopped over the gunwale of the *Orca* onto the dock like a man who had grown up around boats, but he used the ramp to climb aboard the much larger *Jonah*.

Will did not rise to greet him. Based on Brody’s information, Will already knew he would prefer Whiskey’s company to the Vaughn’s.

“Agent Graham, what a pleasure to finally meet you. I meant to stop by as soon as you arrived, but it’s been busy around here. Lots of paperwork, you understand. I’m Larry Vaughn as I’m sure you’ve deduced by now.”

‘*Paperwork*.’ Crime scene photos. Autopsy reports. This was the trouble with government work. Sooner or later victims became paper pulp and figures. “It could be worse,” Will said.

“I don’t see how. The town is dying, Agent Graham,” Vaughn countered and glanced toward the open ocean. The irony of his own words, when five people were already dead, was lost on Vaughn, but it did not escape Will’s notice.

“Regardless, that's not what I came to talk to you about. The city council is badgering me for an update on your progress. It's the beaches we're concerned about so...,”

“Talk to Chief Brody,” Will cut in. “I prefer that communication between the federal and local governments pass through her. This is *her* town,” Will said emphasizing the possessive nature of Brody’s position with the clear intention of needling Vaughn with it.

“Is there nothing you can do? Chief Brody has been less than helpful.”

“You’ll have to take that up with her,” Will repeated. Whiskey licked at Will’s fingers and nibbled on them when he did not pull away. Will frowned. She was too old to be teething. This was puppy behavior that no one had trained her out of, another reason to dislike Mayor Vaughn.

“Be reasonable!” Vaughn shouted oblivious to the judgmental stare Will leveled at him. “You know she’ll never let us open the beaches until that shark is caught, and now your friend tells me that you haven't even seen our alleged shark yet. Is this true?”

Will glared at Hannibal for gossiping about an open investigation and then back at Vaughn “*Alleged* shark? It’s a shark! You know it is! The whole town knows it! Every boardwalk tourist trap has gone crazy with shark fever.”

“Be that as it may, if the tourists can't go to the beach what good is any of the fervor? IF it ***was*** a shark, isn’t it possible that this shark has moved on by now?”

Will's anger rose to a boil. It was lunacy to open the beaches with the body count already so high. "You aren't interested in what's possible or not. You want me to say something that will help you get what you want. Brody warned me about you and the city council."

"Chief Brody oversteps her authority. What the council and I discuss are the confidential matters of this township," Vaughn said.

Will wanted to laugh, so he let himself roar with it. "Hey, see this?" Will asked and lifted up his t-shirt to expose the badge, which was clipped to his hip. "That says 'federal', Buddy. You invited us in, which means we've got the authority around here."

Vaughn folded his hands behind his back. "I see you mean to be uncooperative then."

"I mean to do my job," Will fired back.

"Be careful who you ally yourself with, Agent Graham. Authority is a hard thing to hang onto," Vaughn said as he walked down the ramp with his dogs in tow.

"I could say the same to you," Will called after him and watched the dogs walk away. An overwhelming sense of homesickness swallowed Will up as he thought about his own pack back in Wolf Trap. He'd never been away from them for so long. Was Alana getting tired of his little monsters? She must be. They were a handful, his little family, and he missed them so much. "Come on, Hannibal. We've got work to do."

…

"Will, are you feeling alright?" Hannibal asked later that day.

"Fine. Why do you ask?"

"You're getting stronger every day, Will, but I recall a time when you were more timid among authority figures. Lately, you've grown quarrelsome with Jack and with me, which I understand. Believe me, I do. You know us. You know how we'll respond. It is good to see you testing your limits."

"So what's the problem?" Will said and double-checked their heading against the compass while Hannibal drove the boat.

"How you were with Vaughn today, it was...reckless and frankly somewhat rude, so I ask again: do you feel alright?"

"Hannibal, I'm fine," Will said, but Hannibal reached across the helm and laid his palm across Will's forehead to check his temperature anyway.

"Hey, hey! Hands on the wheel!" Will shouted and swatted Hannibal's hands away.

"Will, what could I possibly hit out here!?" Hannibal snapped. He lifted both hands off the helm and made a grand sweeping gesture at the calm sea. It was a fair point. Far into the distance, a single fishing trolley plodded along a perpendicular route to the *Jonah* dropping a net behind it, but otherwise they were alone on the water.

“You wanted to learn to drive the boat. Well drive the boat or I'm putting you back on chum line duty,” Will said to be cruel.

Hannibal's hands flew to the wheel. “Do you enjoy it? Transgressing the boundaries of authority with Vaughn and threatening me with menial labor? Is that what has made you so bold lately?”

It was a good question, one with weight. Will looked at the flat sea and thought about his dream—the earlier part of his dream *before he had made out with Hannibal.* “No. Enjoyment is not the right word for it, but I do feel different. More powerful.”

“Do you not enjoy feeling powerful?”

“I enjoy not feeling fear, but that is not the same as enjoying a good whiskey or one of your desserts. One is an absence of feeling, and the other is an explosion of it.”

“Which one do you prefer?”

Will smiled. “Obviously the one that involves ganache.” That answer required no thought at all.

Hannibal laughed. “I will make note of that.”

“Can we have some tonight?” Will asked as his stomach growled its agreement.

Hannibal looked at him mournfully. “Quality ingredients are dear in this town. I would be unable to make something that would live up to your expectations. Do you think you could be happy with a sorbet instead?”

“You think too highly of my expectations, but I’ll be more than happy with one of your sorbets.” Will said. Thirty yards off the bow there was a large disturbance in the water, a very large disturbance.  An ominous feeling of foreboding entered the wheelhouse like an unwelcomed guest. “Did you see that? Cut the engine.”

“What did you see, Will?”

Will picked up a set of binoculars and scanned the horizon. Fifteen yards away from the initial disturbance, a dorsal fin broke the surface.

“There.” Will said and gave Hannibal the binoculars. “Look toward the stern of the fishing boat.”

“I see it. Is it our shark?”

“It could be. It's big, big enough to maybe be our shark. You can tell by the distance between the dorsal fin and that tail you see peeking above the waterline.”

Hannibal lowered the binoculars. “What now?”

Will put his hand on Hannibal’s shoulder. “Why, Doctor Lecter, can't you guess?”

Hannibal’s face fell. “The chum line?”

"That's right, Hannibal. Recess is over."

Chapter End Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27 who has been extra awesome this week motivating me to break the hellish edit loop I found myself in on a later chapter. <3 <3 <3

Fun Fact: sharccannibal was inspired by @nim-lock's amazeball artwork. I encourage you to check out their Tumblr and shower them with all your love and reblogs. http://nim-lock.tumblr.com/

# Predators

Chapter Summary

As the hunt drags on, Hannibal's person suit begins to fray at the seams. Remember, Doctor Lecter, perception is a tool pointed at both ends.

Chapter Notes

And we're back to our regularly scheduled programming! Sorry about April, folks. Life got a little hectic, but hopefully April's showers will bring May flowers.

Beta'ed by the amazing @WolfTrapQueen27! <3

The great fish had other plans that day and getting caught was not among them. It ate its fill, slipped back into the deep, and never resurfaced again, which meant Hannibal had manned the chum line all afternoon **for nothing.**

Aggravated as he was, Hannibal couldn't find it in himself to be annoyed at the animal as he closed the lid on the chum bucket. *Really, who could blame it*? How could any predator chase after a bucket of stale old blood when there was fresh meat to be had in the wake of that fishing trolley? Hannibal thought about explaining as much to Will when Will had given him his assignment, but wisely thought better of it in time. Will, as he was now, would not understand the difference between blood that was given vs blood that was taken, but Hannibal did. That shark would have had as much fun consuming Will's dead squid bait as Hannibal would at a McDonalds!

Will liked to talk about a fisherman's instinct when he was bossing Hannibal around on deck. Well Hannibal's instincts told him that they were dealing with something other than an ordinary unintelligent fish. Whatever was out there was a true predator, and Will's fishing expertise might not be enough. True predators were different from the dusky sharks and common psychopaths Will usually pursued. The sooner Will realized this the better, and not just because Hannibal wanted to go back to Baltimore to his large and luxurious home. His grand plan required it. He wished to show Will more of the world, maybe take him to Europe, and share such things as the natural beauty of viscera as it is drawn from a living body. With luck and a little elbow grease, one day Will would see that a slab of flesh and bone could be transformed in ways that would shame Michelangelo and make a fool of Rodin in the hands of the right creator. But he needed to be off this damn boat in order to do so!

Inside the wheelhouse, Will cranked up his music. Steven Tyler screeched over the loud speakers mocking Hannibal's designs for Will's becoming with his yowling.

Okay, so it was going to take **a lot** of elbow grease to transform his Beatrice into a fitting companion.

First things first, Hannibal needed to bring Will back under his control, which was getting harder to do the longer they were away from Baltimore. The long hours and endless bloodshed inflicted upon Will by his job with the FBI were terrible for his health, but useful for Hannibal's purposes. None of that intruded upon their lives here. He and Will were alone with a singular purpose, and Will was growing stronger day by day. Too strong maybe? Strong enough to buck whatever infection was ailing him naturally? Whichever, it spelled trouble for Hannibal. A focused and healthier Will might begin to see what he should not, and that was dangerous for both of them. Much as it would pain him, Hannibal would not hesitate to kill Will to preserve his own life, but he hoped it would not come to that. Maybe Hannibal should stop feeding him so well and let him grow weak again, but that thought left a sour feeling in his stomach.

When Hannibal was through with the chum bucket, he cleaned his palms with a boat rag and admired the patina of blood and oil trapped in the fibers. Will barked an order from the wheelhouse as the boat steamed toward port, but Hannibal ignored it. This was a part of a routine he had established in the days since their arrival. Will was hands down the more experienced skipper and fisherman, and Hannibal would be a fool to challenge his authority on the open water as a relative layman in these areas. But the power dynamics between psychiatrist and patient, predator and prey could not be easily reasserted once abandoned, so Hannibal had to be very careful with Will. When they were tied up in the marina or back on land, it was necessary to make it clear who was in charge without Will becoming aware of Hannibal's designs. He did so with small commands and weaponized rudeness though it bothered him mightily to be so impolite. The transformation began as soon as they turned for port, and ended only when Will was chained to his bed at night.

When enough time had passed, Hannibal joined Will at the helm.

"Did you double check the barrels to make sure they were lashed down? It is supposed to be windy tonight," Will asked standing tall and proud at the helm. There was a certain glow about him today that Hannibal quite liked. Command suited him, and if it had also suited Hannibal's purposes as nicely, Hannibal would have been happy to bask it in and admire the new Will.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't hear that. Please, turn the music down."

Will did as he was told and repeated his question.

"No. We can do it together when we reach port. I would like a glass of wine **now**. I think I have earned that much." Hannibal grumbled.

"Haha, fair enough. Put a couple of beers in the refrigerator while you're down there?"

Hannibal acknowledged the request with only a small nod and went below. He went against orders and did not put any of those weak beers in the fridge. Will would drink a white wine tonight, which had already been carefully matched to the meal Hannibal had planned for them.

He rejoined Will with a glass of Riesling in that ridiculous plastic cup Will had purchased for him and leaned against the back of the captain's chair where Will sat. They rested back-to-back in silence until Hannibal's phone chimed. He reached for the device and tapped into the text message. "Hmm," he said.

"Who is it?"

"Michelle."

"Doctor Hendrix?"

"Yes, the very same. She is asking me to dinner."

Will's shoulder blades grazed Hannibal's back as he stiffened. It seemed an odd response. "You going to go?"

"No. The gazpacho is already made." Hannibal said as he typed up his polite refusal.

"You can go if you want," Will offered.

"Do you need more privacy tonight, Will?" he said with a tiger's smile.

Will's elbow slammed into Hannibal's back, and for once Hannibal was glad to have the spill-proof glass.

"Don't even start with that again!"

Hannibal chuckled still very much amused by Will's shyness following their little incident this morning. But a promise was a promise (generally speaking), and from a psychiatric perspective, Hannibal agreed that he ought to wait until they were home again before discusssing Will's sexuality with him where he could open up that vein decant it properly in more pleasant surroundings. However, that didn't stop him from wondering what Will's fantasies entailed or what he dreamed about at night. "I thought you did not like my spending time with her."

Silence,

"Will?"

"It's fine when it's on your own time, but...when you are here with me; I want your head in the game."

There was a sports metaphor that probably could have been placed there, but Hannibal did not have the terminology to do it properly. "It is a pity about that shark," he said changing the subject.

“Only a little. If we’ve found its favorite spot when it is not otherwise terrorizing the shoreline, it’ll be much easier to track. Sharks aren’t very territorial, so I think it must be here to pup and this area is its nursery.”

“You think it is a female?”

“I do. I don’t know why else it would be hanging around. If my gut is wrong about this, I've got nothing. Maybe this town is just cursed.”

“God works in mysterious ways.”

“You don’t really believe that do you?”

“No, I do not think God is inflicting his wrath upon the town through this shark. Nor do I believe that he even cares about what happens to these...people. I believe as you do—that predators choose their own victims and wield God’s power over life and death according to their own design.”

“You think that’s what I believe?”

*‘If not it is what you will believe eventually,’ Hannibal* thought. “Perhaps tomorrow there will be less competition for its attention,” he said keeping the conversation contained.

“Yeah and maybe my package will have arrived by then,” Will said as the lights of the marina came into view on the horizon.

“What package?”

“You’ll see,” Will smiled cryptically. “Hey, will you—”

Hannibal raised his hand to signal that the understood and stopped Will from finishing his latest request. “I know. I am to tie off at the dock and leave the rest to you.”

Hannibal brought his wine with him onto the deck and threw it back in one gulp while they were still far enough away from the dock that no one would see him. It was a disgrace to treat a good wine so roughly, but it had been a long day and an even longer week. Hannibal’s nerves were beginning to fray at the edges, and a little liquid patience delivered straight to the brain was required at this time.

Will slowed the boat down and shifted into neutral as they coasted into the slip.

Hannibal tossed two lines onto the dock and nimbly jumped down from the *Jonah*. The injury to his leg from his fight with Tobias no longer bothered him, which was of great relief to him. He healed slower than he did as a younger man, but he was too proud to own up to his pain lest Will catch on. The thought of Will mothering him as a result of his feelings of guilt for his perceived involvement in the Tobias incident was mortifying.

Hannibal grabbed the first line and tied it tightly around a cleat as Will had taught him. While he worked to secure the boat for the night, a smaller boat motored up behind the *Jonah*.

“Ahoy!” Chief Brody shouted.

“Good evening,” Hannibal called back at a more respectable volume.

Will exited the wheelhouse and hurried toward the stern. “Chief, what’s wrong? Has something happened?”

Brody cut the engine and idled on the surf. “No, nothing like that. I was just coming in for the night and saw your tall friend tying off. I thought I’d drop by and see how it went out there today.”

“Not well I’m afraid. We might have seen something, but don't get your hopes up. I’m sorry, Chief Brody,” Will said mournfully. His tone and the slump of his shoulders told Hannibal that Will was genuinely sad and not just because of the number of people who had already died. Hannibal sensed there was something else in play too. He crossed his arms in front of his chest and watched the exchange with suspicion.

Since when had he and Brody gotten so chummy? Oh, he hoped Will wasn’t about to invite her to dinner without checking with him first. In addition to there not being enough food to feed three people, Hannibal did not think he could stand to be around anymore law enforcement today. Fending off Will’s sharp mind was a labor unto itself in such close quarters.

The way Will responded to Brody and the manner with which he held his body before her, small and tense, set off all of Hannibal's warning bells. Was this because Jack Crawford was far away and Will needed a new parental figure to replace him? That would fit his profile. Enter Police Chief Margaret Brody, the cop Will always wanted to be before his mental breakdown. *‘Spare me,’* Hannibal thought. It bordered on being too much to endure. Will was capable of so much more if he would only take direction! For Hannibal’s plans to work, he needed Will to look to him for guidance instead of these unremarkable surrogates that Will kept attaching himself to.Honestly, Will Graham could be a pain in the ass to put it colloquially. Maybe something ought to be done about Brody before this got out of hand now that Hannibal was back at full strength.

“It’s okay,” Chief Brody said. “I’m getting used to the disappointments.”

Out of view, Hannibal smirked. He knew Brody didn’t mean the comment in the way that Will would internalize it, but the blow was struck, which served Hannibal’s needs just fine. Plus, it served Will right.

“We’ll catch it. I promise.”

“Well I hope you don’t mind if I help out. I'd rather be out on the water than at my desk taking angry calls from Vaughn.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow as he assessed the tiny boat. “I hope you do not mean to engage the animal in...*that,”* he said more snidely than he intended as he moved into Brody's line of sight.

“Oh no, of course not! But I'll radio you if I see anything. I'm actually working on another case right now. The coast guard has gotten reports that someone has been seen dropping their garbage into the water off the north end. I'm trying to catch the litterbug in the act. I wish I was looking for that damn shark though! I'd love to put a bullet right into one of its black eyes. Stake outs are boring as sin!”

“I’d rather you were bored than get up close and personal with the shark in that dingy you've got there. This fish is smart, Chief. I've never heard of anything like it. The one we saw today was at least twenty feet long if it's the same fish. Bet it could almost snap that boat in two,” Will said.

“The bigger they are, the more fish sticks they make.”

“Speaking of which, do you want to join us for dinner? I'm sure Hannibal wouldn't mind.”

Hannibal dug his heels into the dock and wished a sudden and painful death on Will Graham. *‘Wouldn't mind!?! Do you know me at all, you little…’*

“That's alight. It’s pork chop night at the Brody house, and I wouldn't miss that for the world!”

“You’ve never had dinner at Doctor Lecter’s. There is nothing better,” Will looked up at Hannibal and beamed.

The urge to cut into Will Graham and draw out his entrails through his nostrils abated *somewhat*. Will had an obnoxious way of softening his eyes and lips in such a way that so often made Hannibal’s fury weaken. Hannibal hated it, yet found acquiescing to the expression irresistible. Under other circumstances it might even be fun to explore that desire in himself further, but Hannibal was always aware of the ticking time bomb counting down to disaster inside Will’s skull. Time waited on no one’s pleasure.

But how to beat the clock? The answer had not become anymore clear this week, which was almost as maddening as the circumstances themselves. None of Hannibal's past conquests had been anywhere near as difficult as this poisoned pill. Perhaps he should be more charitable towards Will’s insecurities or at least endeavor to understand them a bit better. Even if meant wasting effort on this backwater brotherhood Will had ingratiated himself into among the local law enforcement. It could help him in the future. No matter what Hannibal did to Brody, Jack remained a problem that was less easily dealt with. Hannibal had learned through trial and error **never** to kill close to home. Eliminating Jack would require a different set of tools. Tools which Hannibal did not yet possess.

Fortunately, Brody had enough manners to decline Will’s ill-timed invitation this time and soon departed.

Hannibal climbed back onto the boat without waiting for Will to set down the ramp and advanced on him. “Will, it is polite to check with the cook BEFORE inviting an extra mouth to the table.”

Will blinked. “I didn't think it would be a problem. There’s always so much food.”

Hannibal placed a hand on Will's shoulder and held it firmly. "It is the principle of the thing," he said close to hissing it.

"Oh," Will said and bent his head like a disobedient dog. "I'm sorry."

Hannibal sighed. There was that damnable face again. "I forgive you, but you have just volunteered yourself to cut the onions tonight."

Will groaned. "I'll trade you; I'll man the chum line all day tomorrow if you chop the onions."

It was a gift of great value and one Hannibal could not accept to his immeasurable sorrow. They were back at the dock now, which meant he could not accept gifts from Will Graham. "That is alright, Will. I do not mind it so much anymore," Hannibal said and swallowed a spoonful of bile.

"Okay, have it your way," Will said before departing. He walked into the wheelhouse and descended the steps, which lead to the living quarters.

Hannibal lingered on deck and allowed himself a moment to fantasize about the many ways he could still choose to make Will pay for the indignities he had been made to suffer on this trip. They were all merely fantasies of course, insubstantial dreams he could never act on. But for a moment, Hannibal allowed himself to be overwhelmed by sensation as he sank his teeth into an imaginary brisket marinated in Will's favorite whiskey. "I will have it my way, Will. No matter what you do," Hannibal said to the evening air.

*'Suffering for your art?'* Will had asked him days ago when they left the police station.

"All the great ones do," Hannibal repeated now on the deck of the *Jonah*.

Will Graham would either be his masterwork or the death of him—perhaps both.

# Blood Is And Blood Was

Chapter Summary

Hannibal catches a glimpse at the dark shadows of Will's past over dinner, but it is not clear who has hooked who with this new piece of information.

Chapter Notes

Warning: references to past childhood and alcoholism in this chapter.

Beta'ed by @Wolftrapqueen27.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was rather pretty when he cried. That was not usually the case among most people in Hannibal’s experience and Hannibal had many experiences to draw from. The tears made his eyes...brighter? Clearer? What was the appropriate adjective for the way his often wishy-washy blue-green eyes transformed to become the solid, stoic blue they were now?

“Is this good enough?” Will asked and flicked his blade at the pile of onions on the cutting board.

“A little more,” Hannibal said and put another onion in front of Will merely because he had one.

“Ugh, you are brutal,” Will sniffled and wiped the tear tracks from his cheeks.

“I am as God made me to be,” Hannibal said as he slid past Will in the tight galley. His elbow collided with Will’s thigh as he bent down to retrieve a saucepan from the cabinet. Hannibal paused to see what Will would do, but Will never even acknowledged the run in. They had become used to these occurrences in the days since their arrival. Accidental collisions in these cramped quarters were as much a part of their nightly routine as the food preparation. In the beginning, they had apologized to one another constantly. Eventually verbal apologies became looks, and now, no apologies were needed. They existed in each other's aura like this was where they were meant to be.

An hour later they were sitting down to a large spread, and Hannibal was forced to admit there would have been enough food for three people.

“Nevertheless, I stand by my position that it was rude to invite Chief Brody without consulting with me first,” Hannibal said and drank his wine from a real glass.

“I have a hard enough time hanging onto my own values and decency. I don’t have room in my head for yours too, Doctor Lecter,” Will said formally, but the set of his eyebrows marked him true. Will was trying to bait him with his Doctor Lecters, the little devil.

“Touché,” Hannibal said with a smirk and hoped that one day soon those values would not be so dissimilar as to require the extra effort. But Will needed to be changed first, and the incident with Brody had given Hannibal an idea. “Will, I’d like to ask you about your father,” he said in an attempt to open Will up. So far they had only talked about fatherhood with regards to Abigail and the Lost Boys case. Perhaps a more casual environment would yield new riches.

“As my psychiatrist or my friend?” Will said and refilled his wine glass.

“I am not sure myself,” Hannibal admitted, “but I will ask my questions and you can decide for yourself whether to answer or not.”

“That doesn't sound much different than therapy,” Will said and frowned.

“What would make it different?”

Will did not speak. He swirled his wine around in his glass playing with it in a way that irked Hannibal. “Okay, ask away, but anything I say on this trip is off the record. No notes. Is that fair?”

“I can do that, but I cannot promise that’ll just forget whatever you tell me in confidence.”

Will nodded. “Fine. At least appearances will be maintained. We can fake the rest.”

“What was your father like?” Hannibal asked and cast his line.

Will grimaced. “You’ve met him already or a version of him at least. He was kinda like Quint, a lot like Quint actually.”

Hannibal leaned away from the table. This was unexpected since Will seemed to openly despise Captain Quint, but perhaps it was not Quint whom Will despised. He must still respect some things about his father or he would not have taken such pride in the lessons he passed on to Hannibal from his father. Perhaps it was an imago not a replacement that Will sought in the commendable Jack and Brody. Hannibal almost pitied Will for his poor choice of character, *almost*. Personally, he couldn't wait for Will's Jack phase to end. Jack was a entertaining dinning companion and a useful tool, but Hannibal could bear to lose him. His righteous stubbornness had an inconvenient effect on Will, and Hannibal only needed one of them to be entertained and stay one step ahead of the FBI. He would trade Jack Crawford for Will Graham any day.

In Jack, Will would find nothing but disappointment. Jack was driven and uncaring, but Hannibal suspected that Will deeply craved to be cared for. Brody was more difficult. There

was a genuine goodness in her. She was stainless steel and hard to tarnish—all the more reason to do away with her. But Jack and Brody were problems for another day. Right now, his attentions belonged to Will.

“How so?” Hannibal asked.

“On his good days, when he was sober, my father was kind and patient.” Will said and looked in the direction of the *Orca* with an expression that flickered between sour and sorrowful.

“He taught you many things.”

“He taught me to fish. He taught me how to fix things, and he taught me that being a good person takes a lot of work. I appreciated that.” Will said with warmth and never looked away from Quint’s boat.

Conversing with Will when he was in these melancholic moods was like playing chess with a brick. The brick gave you no information you couldn't glean for yourself and would make no move on its own. You had to push the brick into action if you wanted the game to go on, but the Norman Rockwell picture Will had painted for him of gentler times with his father had told Hannibal exactly what he needed to know to make his next move. “Will...your father...he taught you about some bad things too didn’t he?”

Will’s head swung around in the opposite direction like the boom of a sailboat. “I am not going to answer that.”

A frown ghosted across Hannibal's lips when his trap came up empty, but at least he knew he was on the right track.

“Did he hurt you?” Hannibal asked and intentionally did not specify whether he was asking about physical or emotional abuse.

Will’s hand twitched involuntarily towards his knife. Physical then.

“I’m not going to answer that either.”

*'Stubborn, bull-headed, boy.'* Playing chess with a brick might be easier.

“Talk to me about sharks, the ones you caught from the beach. Were they like the little duskies?”

The tension left Will's jaw and neck with the change in conversation. “Sometimes. Mostly they were smaller because the bigger fish like to hang out in deeper water, but sometimes we caught large prey: makos, bull sharks...tigers.”

“Tigers?” Hannibal had been reading Will’s books while he slept. While tiger sharks did inhabit the gulf sea, they would not have been common in Louisiana. “That must have been something remarkable and rare. Tell me about tigers, Will.”

Will fiddled with his fork adjusting it twice before he was satisfied. “They are appropriately named. They’re strong, agile, and can be vicious when they choose to be. Beautiful too.

Picture the auburn hide of a dusky with mottled stripes on its side. If the the great white is the apex predator of the ocean, tigers are velociraptors—a little smaller but no less lethal. They're maneaters too, one of three species most commonly involved in shark attacks."

"You've seen one."

"I've seen three," Will said and held up three fingers. "Three before I was twelve years old. They're incredible, Hannibal! And...terrifying."

"How did you catch them?"

"For a large shark like that, everything has to be big. You need at least a 20 aught hook and a large piece of bait. We'd catch a lot of stingrays and use those. Although…," Will spooned a large bite of food into his mouth to excuse himself from continuing.

"Although *what?"*

"Sometimes my dad liked to use the little sharks we'd catch from the pier as the bait."

"Your dad fed sharks to sharks?"

Will blushed and looked away. "Yeah. You could say it's something Abigail and I have in common; we have cannibalism in our blood."

This was fascinating, and opened up a new avenue to explore. When they got back to Baltimore, Hannibal would arrange to have Will take Abigail fishing. He could not wait to see the effect it would have on Will. This was absolutely delicious!

"How did you catch your tigers, Will?

"I've already told you."

"You have told me how to catch a shark, but you have not told me in any great detail about *your* catches. How old were you? What was the weather like? How did it feel to catch your first tiger? Walk me through the day, Will. To borrow a phrase, show me your design."

"We didn't do it often you understand. There are seasons for these things and some species are illegal to hunt. You have to be careful."

*Hunt?* An unusual word choice. Will usually said lure when he discussed fishing. Hannibal smelled blood in the water now. "Careful with the shark? Or careful not to get caught?"

"Both," Will said quietly thumbing the base of his glass. It looked like he was going drink again and couldn't make up his mind.

"Were you ever caught, Will?"

"No." Will said confidently.

“Was your dad ever caught?” Hannibal asked giving Will a little more line on which to hook himself.

“No,” Will said, but there was a pause before he answered.

Strike two. Hannibal tapped the side of his glass at a loss for how to proceed. He knew he did not have long before Will closed himself off again. Hannibal flipped through his mental notes looking for a new angle to pick at. He found it when he noticed Will playing with his wine again—playing, not drinking it.

“Did your father drink when you went fishing?”

Silence.

“Will, you’ve already told me your father drank. Alcoholism in a parent is-”

“He never drank in front of me! I only dealt with the aftermath,” Will snapped and clenched his fist around the stem of his wine glass. He was upset and digging in. Strike three. Game over.

“I believe you, Will.” Hannibal said and chose to leave the conversation there for today. Surely that insufferable shark intended him to be trapped on this boat with Will for many more days to come. He would try again tomorrow. “Would you like that sorbet now, Will?”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

…

After the meal, they read until it was time for Hannibal to tuck Will into bed and handcuff him to the bedpost. Will still fought him every night regarding the handcuffs, but his tantrums were growing shorter each time.

Will fell asleep quickly and was almost immediately consumed by nightmares. While Hannibal contemplated taking an Ambien so he might get *some* sleep tonight, Will began to speak.

“Dad? Dad?” He bleated in a voice so soft and weak that it reminded Hannibal of a kitten.

Hannibal slipped from his bed and knelt at Will’s side.

“Yes, Will?” He said and gently brushed Will’s curls away from his sweat soaked forehead.

“Dad,” Will’s lips trembled before forming his next words. “Did we kill him?”

Hannibal’s mouth fell open thinking that he had misheard.

“Who did we kill, Will?”

Will’s face relaxed as his mind was pulled in another direction and moved on to more peaceful dreams.

“Will? Will?” Hannibal whispered in his ear hoping to call him back. “William?”

Will rolled away from him and left Hannibal in the dark to ponder this new and unexpected twist: Garret Jacob Hobbs was not Will’s first victim. Hannibal’s mind reeled with the implications. Will’s attachment to Abigail; his distress over the Lost Boys; the compulsions which drove him to save lives at the cost of his own…

A new portrait of Will Graham began to take shape—one which was much more penetrable—and fatherhood was the key.

“My dear Will,” Hannibal said grinning as he sat on the floor with his back against his own bed. “I feel like I hardly know you.”

Will slept peacefully for the first time all week. His breath rose and fell with the swells while Hannibal watched and committed the sight to memory.

“Sleep well, my friend. I look forward to meeting you one day,” Hannibal said and began charting a new course.

...

In the dark corridors of Hannibal’s mind palace where he dared not often tread, a door creaked open and allowed light into the hallway for the very first time. But that was not all that slipped through the doorway. Something invisible to Hannibal’s analytical mind stepped over the threshold. It laughed with malevolent delight and bounded further into the darkness bringing change to whatever it touched.

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: the title of this chapter comes from a line of prophecy in the Wheel of Time that I particularly love and felt thematically appropriate. "Blood feeds blood. Blood calls blood. Blood is, and blood was, and blood shall ever be." If there are any Wheel of Time fans out there, you may also enjoy my Wheel of Time AU Some Other Worlds Are Even Less Kind.

# When It Rains

Chapter Summary

> Red skies at morning, Hannigram take warning. A sudden storm traps the boys at port, and Hannibal has a startling epiphany that will shake up their friendship in an irreversible way.

Chapter Notes

> Beta'ed by @Wolftrapqueen27 xoxo

Dark clouds blanketed the harbor and dropped a soft rain on the boats anchored there, but it was the booming sound of thunder that woke the two men up.

“That sounds unpleasant,” Hannibal said from his bed.

Will rolled onto his side and reached for his phone with the hand not fastened to the bedpost. “That's not what you have to worry about. The waves could get bad, real bad. You should go into town. I’m sure someplace is open for breakfast by now.”

“Where will you be?”

“Here. I’m expecting a delivery today. I don’t want to miss it if it comes,” Will said as he checked the weather app: scattered storms all morning, lovely.

Hannibal chewed on his bottom lip considering his choices: brave the storm and get tossed about like the laundry or face a generous portion of subpar shrimp and grits.

“I will stay,” he said eventually.

“You don’t have to. I don’t mind waiting it out by myself.”

Hannibal got out of bed to free Will from his restraints. “I will stay,” he said again with a stern warning in his voice as he sat on the edge of Will’s bed. It was the tone he used when he was growing testy. The glower would soon follow if Will was not careful.

Hannibal was actually a lot more expressive than he got credit for, and his moods were as fickle as the wind, Will was learning. Or maybe it was being so far from home that allowed him to unwind. On the ocean Hannibal was compliant even when he was sulking, but back at the docks, he grew insistent and often quarrelsome. This tale of two Hannibals troubled Will

as he hand no explanation for it. Will wondered if Hannibal felt uneasy on the open water for some secret reason he that he was unwilling to share.

“Okay,” Will said and lowered his eyes in acceptance. He noticed then that Hannibal’s hand rested on his leg. When did that happen? “Coffee?” he asked.

“I shall see to it straight away.” Hannibal stood up and dressed for the day.

Will averted his eyes while Hannibal changed and stared out the porthole above his bed. The horizon was already gone, swallowed whole by the approaching storm. Slate gray and opaque, the stormwall had an ominous quality and it was coming on quickly. Will felt like he was speeding toward a brick wall in a car without a wheel instead of sitting idly by waiting for it. When it rained, it certainly poured.

When he heard the door click shut, Will got up and put on yesterday’s shorts and a fresh t-shirt.

...

It wasn’t long before the storm got bad. Hannibal was still setting out breakfast when the boat began to rock.

“Will you go check my lines?” Hannibal asked as he struggled to make his morning coffee, while the boat pitched restlessly in the slip.

“I’m sure it's fine,” Will assured him.

“Go check them anyway,” Hannibal snapped. “Please?”

Will raised an eyebrow in surprise. “Okay, but you better have that coffee ready when I get back.”

Hannibal’s agitation turned out to be well placed. He had indeed tied the lines improperly the night before. Nothing too terrible would have happened, but Will undid the slip knot and pulled the boat closer to the dock so it would not bounce so much. For extra measure, he attached a third line to an unused clet before returning to the cabin, soaked to the bone.

Hannibal greeted him below with a dry towel in one hand and coffee in the other.

“Thank you,” Will said taking the coffee first.

“How were the lines?”

“Fine. No need to worry,” Will bluffed.

“Good. I am glad,” Hannibal sighed with relief. “Would you like some cantaloupe for breakfast or would you prefer something warm.”

“Warm, please. Oatmeal?”

“With brown sugar and strawberries the way you like it. Now go change into something dry, and put *yesterday’s* shorts in the hamper,” Hannibal smirked.

Will winced. Hannibal missed **nothing.** It was amazing *he* hadn’t caught the Ripper yet.

…

Will's oatmeal was waiting for him after he dressed for the second time today. It was piping hot and perfect. Will was going to miss these prepared meals when life returned to normal. Honey Nut Cheerios were no substitute for Hannibal’s home cooking.

Hannibal spent his entire morning sketching at an unusual pace. Will watched him complete three drawings in the time it had taken Will to eat, clean the kitchen, and catch up on emails.

“Hey, are you okay?”

“I am fine.” Hannibal replied without looking up from his latest drawing.

“You seem off today.”

“Do I? Why do you say that?”

Will frowned. This game of twenty questions could get real old fast. He got up and came to stand beside Hannibal who had taken over the table beside the kitchenette. “I hope you’re not coming down with whatever I have. Move over.”

“What you have is not contagious,” Hannibal said as he moved over.

“We don’t know what I have.”

“Mental illness is--”

“It’s not mental ill--whatever. This isn’t about me. It’s about you. Stop dodging my questions. You’re not afraid of storms are you?”

“Not at all. I find storms to be quite beautiful. When God sat down to create the human heart. I suspect he modelled it after a hurricane.”

“Then what are you afraid of?” Will pressed.

Hannibal did not look up from his sheet of paper where he was finishing up a portrait of a dusky shark. “Who says I am afraid of anything?”

“Hannibal," Will scoffed and rolled his eyes.

Still no response. Will reached across the page and placed his hand on top of Hannibal’s drawing hand, which accidentally caused Hannibal to slash a thick black line through his portrait.

“Stop this. You’re acting weird. Ballast. Remember? It goes both ways. If you sink, I sink. Tell me what’s wrong,” Will said remembering the words Hannibal had said to him during their picnic and how good they had made him feel that day. Maybe they would work in reverse.

But when Hannibal looked up at Will, it was like looking into the eyes of another person. His lip curled ever so slightly in anger and irritation, like a dog about to attack. When Will blinked, it was over and Hannibal was Hannibal again. Then Will felt Hannibal’s pulse quicken beneath his hand and Hannibal’s eyes widen in an expression of surprise. Hannibal shook his hand free and ran it across his face in clear distress, which left a bit of charcoal on his cheeks and nose.

“Uhhh….Hannibal? You really don’t seem okay.”

“Ah, yes. Yes, forgive me. I was distracted by a stray thought. It is nothing. I am just...tired. Yes, I am tired,” Hannibal...babbled. There was no other word for it. Now Will was really worried.

“It’s **not** nothing.”

Hannibal picked up his glass of water and drained it before speaking. “You were asking about fear?”

Okay, this was getting ridiculous. How many ways was Hannibal going to try to throw him off the scent of what was really wrong? Whatever. He’d play along. Sometimes the way to get what you wanted from Hannibal was to just let him have his way until an opportunity to flip the tables on him presented itself. “Does this have anything to do with why you’re being so weird all of a sudden?”

“Depends on how you look at it,” Hannibal grumbled.

“Help me to see, Hannibal.”

The look Hannibal gave him was almost a pout. “If you knew how hard I was trying,”

“Excuse me? Because it looks like the opposite from where I’m sitting. Spill it.”

Hannibal fiddled with his pencils and his face went slack again. “I guess you could say that I am afraid of drowning,” he said sounding much more like himself: emotionless and aloof. “It is a...well, it is a merciless way to go at the hands of a power greater than yourself.”

Will rightfully did not believe him. “But...you can swim. I know you go to the gym to swim. How can you be afraid of drowning?”

“I learned to swim because I am afraid, Will. By facing my fear, I grow stronger than it. Remember, I have suggested the same to you.”

Will had never put much stock into exposure therapy. As someone who had been exposed to just about every frightful experience in existence, he felt justified in that belief. What good

had exposure ever done him? “Hannibal...you’re on a boat. You agreed to come on this boat. You’re living on this boat!”

“Will, I think we’ve established that I am on a boat.”

“I am immune to your sarcasm right now. If you were afraid of something like that you shouldn't have come. Why did you do it?”

Hannibal squirmed, visibly squirmed, like a fish on a line. “I-I don’t know if I have a good enough answer for that right now. I...think the storm has made me face certain truths about myself. If we should sink…,”

Will could not recall a time when he had ever seen Doctor Hannibal “Fancy Pants” Lecter tongue tied.“We’re not going to sink.”

“I know, but if we ***should*** sink…,”

“Hannibal, if we sink then you can swim, and there are life vests. I won’t let you drown.”

“Yes, but…”

“Ballast, Hannibal. Believe. In. Me.”

Hannibal’s face changed from unease to awe. It was a moment of epiphany and change. Even the rough seas quieted to listen in. “Remarkable. Here I thought I was guiding you, but you’ve been in control of the board for some time now haven't you? Simply remarkable.”

“What are you talk--,” but Will did not get to finish that sentence because at that moment Hannibal leaned over and brushed Will’s lips with his own.

Will felt entirely too many things in that instant. But the flick of Hannibal’s tongue against his lips jolted him out of his thoughts. Will yelped in a way that was puppy-like in pitch. He clapped a hand over his mouth before he could embarrass himself further, nearly as shocked by the sound he’d made as by the kiss itself. Guilt set in when he saw himself reflected in Hannibal’s eyes. Will forced his hand away from his mouth and searched frantically for words that could turn back time. Having been rejected many times before and most recently by Alana, Will knew that there were tactful ways to rebuff someone, and this was not one of them. Will didn’t want to be cruel. He definitely didn’t want to be cruel to Hannibal, but he didn't have the tools to process this upheaval of the status quo. So Will sat stone still, horrified by Hannibal and horrified **for** Hannibal.

Hannibal backed off and slid as far away from Will as he was able to, which wasn't far in the small dinning area. He was boxed in between the hull of the boat and and Will’s body.

“I’m sorry,” the men said in unison.

“Hannibal, I--,”

“Don’t. Having been rejected so recently yourself, I hope you will show me some kindness by not pressing the matter further, Will. I misjudged certain...intimacies between us and have

acted unprofessionally. Please, accept my apologies," he said; however, the words did not sound conciliatory. They sounded like a command.

Will's mind was still stuck on the kiss: how it had felt and what it surely meant. "But...you..Hannibal, you...do you...do you like me? That way? I mean….I know you like me, but do you….damn. I am making a mess of this. What I mean to say is--"

"Will, please. It is hardly fair to have this conversation now. You have me at somewhat of a disadvantage," Hannibal said and gestured with his eyes at the cramped corner he'd been forced to retreat into.

"Oh! Right! Sorry. I'm so sorry." Will said and scrambled out of the seat to allow Hannibal some breathing room. "I'm really sorry."

"Stop" Hannibal said with annoyance. He began to calmly and quickly round-up his papers. "I think I shall read in our--in **the** bedroom for a bit and go for a walk after it has stopped raining. I fear I have been too long on this boat without the opportunity to seek alternative company—a mistake I do not intend to repeat. We can discuss this tonight if you like, or not at all, if that is preferable. You need not worry about me." But the way his voice was changing, from hurt and patient, to cold and angry, gave Will every reason to worry. It wasn't long ago that Will had decided he wanted to become Hannibal's friend. One week later and Will had blown it all to hell by relaxing too many boundaries. Fabulous. Will felt wretched watching Hannibal draw away, but knew not to expect anything else. They could never be friends again like they were before.

"Yeah, sure. Whatever you want, Han--," Will said and stumbled. "Doctor Lecter. Let me know if you want me to prep anything for dinner while you are out."

"I planned to eat *leftovers* tonight since we have so many." Hannibal said briskly and retreated to the bedroom.

There was no mistaking the emphasis on leftovers or what it meant. Will was really in the doghouse now.

As soon as the door closed behind Hannibal, Will rubbed his face and let his fingers linger over the spot where Hannibal had kissed him.

Christ.

Hannibal had kissed him.

There was so many things wrong with that statement.

One: Hannibal was his fucking psychiatrist! How was that for a conflict of interest?

Two: Will had never been interested in men before. Granted he hadn't really been interested in many people. Sex wasn't really a need for him unless it was with the right person. He had thought Alana might be the right person, but she didn't want him. He had never considered

Hannibal before now, although that wasn't quite true, was it? Some part of him had dreamed up that nightmare the day before. Did...did he...**want**...Hannibal?

Three and most importantly: Hannibal was useful. If this ruined their working relationship as well as their friendship, Will worried he'd lose the his ability to serve the FBI, and if he couldn't do his job...well, Will wasn't sure he could keep the darkness at bay that had taken up residence inside of him.

*'What am I doing?'* Will pushed the thoughts out of his mind and went to make a second pot of coffee. He shouldn't be thinking about this. They were patient and psychiatrist, friend and colleague. It was complicated and messy, and Will's life already had enough of both. No, that was a door that he couldn't allow to remain open.

And yet...what had he just got done telling Alana a couple weeks ago.

*'Stop thinking so much.'*

Well Will intended to. Starting right now, he was not going to think about kissing Hannibal Lecter anymore.

The moment it stopped raining, Hannibal was off without a word in Will's direction. Gone was the J Crew wardrobe he'd rush delivered to the docks after his first disastrous day on the water. He was dressed in one of his suits when he left, a brown one with a maroon and honey check pattern. Will continued to quietly sip at his coffee trying to keep his mind as blank as humanly possible until the call arrived from the UPS truck.

With help from Bud, the errant road cop in charge of traffic violations, and Chief Brody, Will was able to get his very large packages down to the docks and onboard the *Jonah* . Sensing something wrong Brody offered to stay and help.

"It's not a big deal," Will said. "I enjoy this kind of thing."

"Is Doctor Lecter around?" she asked.

"He went shopping." It was probably true, and thus an easy lie to sell.

Appeased, Brody left to resume her stakeout of the Tybee Island Litterbug and Will threw himself into the work. The shark cage had arrived in pieces and needed to be assembled, which presented Will with a distraction from the icy tingle on his lips where Hannibal's kiss had marked him.

Quint stopped by too, but he was not as easily disposed of.

"How much are they paying you at the FBI to do a fool thing like this?

"It's not about the money, Quint. I don't expect you to understand it," Will explained as he used a drill to screw in the flotation tanks.

"Is it too late to take out a life insurance policy on yer sorry ass?"

“I don’t know. Why don’t you go find out and leave me alone.”

“Speaking of, where’s yer boyfriend at?”

Will startled and dropped his drill, which made Quint laugh.

“Haha, somethin’s got you rattled, boy, and I don’t think it’s our shark. You two fightin’?”

“It’s not like that, Quint. He’s out shopping,” Will explained as he retrieved his drill and climbed back up the ladder to finish attaching the last fastening.

“It’s almost supper. Been gone a long time.”

Of course he knew. Quint had probably been spying on them from the Orca, but he was right; the sun was already setting over the lowlands dyeing the earth red. “Red skies at night, sailors delight. Red skies at morning, sailors be warning,” Will murmured.

“A good omen,” Quint said nodding in approval.

“I wouldn’t bet on it,” Will grumbled. His gut left him with a very bad feeling.

…

Hannibal didn’t come back until after ten. He rolled in like a lion emerging from the tall grasses; his hair disheveled, his tie missing, and the top two buttons of his shirt undone.

Will was whittling a piece of driftwood in the galley and letting the shavings fall into the kitchen sink to keep his mess contained. He did not think Hannibal had much forbearance left to test today by messing up his kitchen. “What happened to you?” Will asked with concern.

“I had lunch with Michelle,” he said and checked his watch with purpose implying that they had fucked for the rest of the time.

“You found some *‘alternative company’* I see,” Will said surprised by how hoarse his voice sounded.

“It seemed necessary.”

At least it answered one of Will’s questions about which team or teams Hannibal swung for. “I’m glad you enjoyed yourself,” Will said and tried to put some genuine sincerity in it. If Will couldn’t be there for Hannibal in the way that he needed, then it was good that he could find it elsewhere. Right? Will just wished it did not have to be with Doctor Hendrix. He really...**really** couldn’t stand her.

Hannibal stared at him challengingly, but Will did not rise to the bait. “Thank you” he said at last. “Did you eat?” Hannibal asked as he removed his jacket and folded it over a chair.

Will blushed and quickly turned back to his whittling project. With the jacket removed, Will could clearly see several purple suck bruises peeking above the collar of Hannibal’s dress shirt just like Hannibal wanted him to. “I did.”

“Is there anything we need to talk about, Will?”

Will had spent all day thinking up different tactics to take when Hannibal finally returned. Now, he couldn’t think of one of his rehearsed scripts. Not one. “No, I think we’ve both made our positions quite clear," he said glumbly.

"Good. Now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to be left alone," he said and retreated to the bedroom.

# It Pours

Chapter Summary

Hannibal had three strict rules: never never kill close to home; never never compromise one's aesthetics for security; and NEVER become overly fond of the food. They were critical, these three tenets. They were the bedrock of the life he had built for himself, and in defiance of his good sense and discipline, he had broken the most sacred of the three when he kissed Will Graham.

Chapter Notes

Beta'ed by Wolftrapqueen27

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal had three strict rules: never never kill close to home; never never compromise one's aesthetics for security; and NEVER become overly fond of the food. They were critical, these three tenets. They were the bedrock of the life he had built for himself, and in defiance of his good sense and discipline, he had broken the most sacred of the three when he kissed Will Graham.

Hannibal wished he could claim it had been calculated, that it was part of his game plan, but he could not. Oh no! No, this regrettable decision had only come upon him at the end of a series of rapid-fire realizations about his own character that had escalated WELL beyond his control. Now, everything was a mess.

It had started with the nightmares. Here could shift some of the blame onto Will. After the startling revelation an unconscious Will had murmured in his sleep, Hannibal's sleep, when he slept, had been full of dreams of Will. In the worst of these, a twelve year old Will threaded a large hook through Hannibal's cheek on a pier above a writhing mass of people. "Live bait to catch a killer," the boy had explained. "They like to eat their own."

In the dream, Hannibal had gone along with it all as meek as a spring lamb. He had even helped Will push the hook through his cheek since his small hands lacked the strength to complete the act. Upon waking, it horrified Hannibal to remember how freely and completely he'd surrendered to Will. It was most unlike him, and contrary to his current plans for his prey.

When he found himself confined to the boat because of the storm, Hannibal grew increasingly uncomfortable in Will's presence. The dreams lingered. They followed in Will's

shadow as he moved around the cabin with a grace Hannibal had not previously noticed in him. All his preconceived notions about Will had been upended, which unnerved Hannibal. Will Graham was a killer from long ago. Hannibal's designs for him were no longer wholly his own, which he found unsettling.

It got worse when Will rudely intruded upon the sanctuary of his art causing Hannibal to step out of character when he rounded on the FBI agent. In that moment, Will had seen Hannibal clearly, but rather than becoming afraid or disgusted, Will appeared first shocked, then interested, then sorrowful when he equated Hannibal's anger with his own actions in the end.

Hannibal buttoned up his disguise as fast as he could, but he could not shake free of the moment when Will had glimpsed the beast that dwelt inside his heart with curiosity instead of revulsion.

At that point, Hannibal could not stop looking back at Will, and the longer Hannibal looked, the worse it got. He had always admired what sunlight did to Will's eyes, but he had never considered what stormclouds could do to them in kind. In the dimly lit cabin, while the wind and rain raged outside, Will's eyes were transformed into two sapphire reflecting pools, and in them Hannibal saw the truth he had obfuscated from himself.

He desired Will Graham, desired him physically, and not just as a companion in crime and ideology. The realization set off a chain reaction of explosive thought culminating in the ill-conceived impulse to KISS Will Graham.

Hannibal was still too shocked by his own actions to process the scene fully. This was the stuff of fantasy, a fantasy which he had admittedly allowed himself to indulge in before, when he was not in the mood for any major production. The idea of seducing a patient, especially one who worked for the FBI, was fraught with danger and a licentious transgression. It was irresistibly erotic, and if the patient in question did have such a fine ass, all the better. But **actually** kissing Will had never been an actionable thought! Never! Never? Never say never. God, what was happening to him? This would **never** work.

Will was straight. Will liked Alana. Will had driven an hour through the snow to tell him exactly that.

So here he was, twelve hours removed from the worst decision of his life. But that was not even the worst part. No, the worst part had come later, immediately later in fact.

Yes, this morning, *he had kissed Will Graham,* but for a brief moment, he had thought Will had opened his mouth ever so slightly and pushed back.

It happened like a lightning bolt--there one moment and gone the next with only the smell of ozone in the air to mark its passing. When Will pulled away, he looked nervous, afraid and...ashamed. It had hurt. It had hurt a lot actually, like a slap across the face.

Hannibal could not remember the last time he had been rejected. He regarded himself as a superior lover, and he always ensured that his partner enjoyed themselves even when he was merely using them for his own ends. He had experience to offer and a wide range of sexual tastes. This did not happen to him!

The rest of the day had passed in a haze of unfamiliar emotions and adequate sex. Hannibal had only begun to feel better after he had returned home to parade his bruised and bitten body with lethal intent. He had hoped to incite Will to talk about what they had done earlier, but he settled for the wounded look Will shot him after he noticed the presents Michelle had sent Hannibal home with by request. It was not a resolution but it was a comfort. He took it as proof that Will felt some claim on him, and that soothed the injury dealt by Will's rebuke.

Empathizing with his distress, Will was uncharacteristically docile when Hannibal restrained him for the night. He even brought the handcuffs over to Hannibal presuming that Hannibal might be too uncomfortable to broach the subject himself. The exchange had taken on a new intimacy since this morning. It was difficult to appear casual and not linger on the sight of Will's fitted boxers, the abdominal muscles beneath his thin cotton shirt, or the embarrassed flush on his cheeks. He had always found Will aesthetically pleasing and Hannibal used to enjoy this awkward little boudoir show, but now Will was not just a pretty thing to look at. Will was something Hannibal coveted on multiple levels and dimensions. Knowing that it could never **fully** be, even if Hannibal was successful in reprogramming Will on an intellectual level, irritated him.

Hannibal felt large and clumsy as he slipped the handcuffs around Will's wrist. "Are you comfortable?" he asked reciting the first line of their nightly script.

"Yes."

"Can I get you anything before I turn out the light?"

"No, thank you."

It was all so routine, all so ordinary, until it came time for the sign off.

'*Good night, Will. Sweet dreams,'* should flow into, *'Good night, Hannibal. I hope I don't wake you,'* but it was too unbearable to go through with.

Hannibal turned out the light and retreated to his bed. He lay with his back to Will with the covers drawn up to his neck despite the heat. He felt very aware of the bite marks and scratches decorating his body, and no longer wished Will to see them. He just wanted to go sleep and feel nothing for awhile.

"Good night, Hannibal," Will supplied a few minutes later. "I hope I don't wake you."

*Damn you, Will Graham.* Lightning wasn't supposed to strike the same place twice, but Hannibal's heart bore the scorch marks to prove it.

…

Predictably, Hannibal did not sleep much that night either and was awake to hear the footsteps pacing back and forth on the deck of the *Jonah*. Hannibal sat up and looked at Will who slept and twitched through whatever dream he was having. *'Should I wake him?'* Hannibal wondered. Above, there was more noise and the clanging of metal.

At that moment, Will made a soft cry and arched obscenely beneath the sheets in either pain or euphoria—it was difficult to tell. His left arm, the one attached to the bed post, came up off the mattress and pulled against the restraints. The veins on his arm popped and his muscles contracted while he pulled. Eventually he collapsed back onto the mattress in a boneless heap.

Hannibal felt fire on his cheeks. It was not a face he planned on showing to Will. So he got up, slipped on his Sperrys, and went topside where he found Quint standing beside the shark cage.

“Good morning, Mr. Quint. Can I help you? You seem to be lost.”

“Nah, not lost. I just had to get a better look at the damn thing. You really gonna let yer boyfriend go through with it?”

To be honest, Hannibal had not given the cage much thought since he had been distracted by other matters last night.

“He will do as he thinks he must,” Hannibal said tersely.

“Would you mind taking my picture with it? I wanna send it to my niece. Figure I better do it now before that shark chews through it like a tin can.

Hannibal acquiesced in order to make Quint go away sooner and studied the cage when he was alone again. So this was Will’s secret weapon? He was finally ready to swim with the real predators, was he? A wicked smile appeared on Hannibal’s face, which allowed his own sharply pointed teeth to peek through. “We’ll see about that, dear Will.”

…

Hannibal went back below deck. He made coffee, ate breakfast by himself, and ignored Will’s first two appeals for assistance because he felt exhausted and peckish.

“I'm sorry, Will. I didn't hear you calling. The sunrise was most beautiful today. You should have seen it,” he said upon entering the bedroom. The smile he wore was friendly, but his tone belied his irritation.

“Yeah, well,” Will jiggled the chain of the handcuffs to illustrate his point. “Let me up already. I’ve got to pee.”

Hannibal took his sweet time looking for the key in the drawer of the nightstand. Will’s sour expression let Hannibal know that Will knew exactly what he was doing. Good.

“Christ,” Will gasped when Hannibal sat down on the edge of his bed to unlock the handcuffs. “What happened to you? Did you have sex or get mauled by a bear?”

“Hmm?”

Will blushed and tapped his own chest.  Hannibal remembered then that the bite marks were not confined to his back; however, a lack of sleep had restored his ability to be catty so

Hannibal did not shy away from the lance. “Something like that. You should try it some time. Sex can be very therapeutic, Will” Hannibal exited the room leaving Will to stew on that pair of double entendres.

Hannibal took an exceptionally long shower leaving Will to fend for himself as far as breakfast was concerned. As Hannibal dressed and assessed the damage done to his body, he chastised himself again for letting yesterday get out-of-hand in every way imaginable. He brushed a particularly nasty mark on his collar bone where Michelle had nearly broken the skin. Irritating as the marks would be days from now, he had to admire the way she used her teeth. She had been savage, but never more than he had asked for even when no words were exchanged, which was remarkable for someone without Will’s gifts. Hannibal was not any easy man to read, yet Michelle had somehow known what he had wanted and given it freely —a remarkable woman. In some other time or in some other world, perhaps she might have meant something more to Hannibal. She was interesting, but she wasn't Will or even Bedelia for that matter. Hannibal imagined that he would tire of her quickly; however, he didn’t think he could ever tire of Will.

*‘No! Stop that!’* he thought.

Will was off limits for now. If his plans had needed recalibration before, they required much more than that now. Hannibal needed a new mission statement, strategy, weapons. He needed everything from the ground up to make Will his. He also needed to get his hands on some concealer to cover up these hickies. Or a scarf…

No, no scarf. He still had some dignity left.

Hannibal chose a blue crew neck shirt and the stupid button up shirt with the palm tree on the pocket, which Will had purchased for him before his replacement wardrobe had arrived. He left the cotton shirt unbuttoned and popped the collar ostensibly to protect his neck from sunburn. It hid the worst of the marks, and if Will chose to view the shirt as a peace offering that would be good too. He combed through his hair before finally surrendering the bathroom so Will could take a turn in the shower.

But Will, it seemed, had no intention of showering, and if Hannibal had been busy drawing up a new battle plan then Will had been preparing for a war.

“What is all this?” Hannibal asked referring to the the equipment and gaffe sticks which were suddenly everywhere.

Will was dressed in a wetsuit and was busy attaching a needle to a long stick. “This is how we’re going to kill that shark.”

“You really mean to do this? Go into the water with that animal?”

“I've swam with worse predators.”

Hannibal crossed his arms in front of his chest since he was standing. “Usually you have backup.”

Will smirked. “Why Doctor Lecter, I thought you were supposed to my backup?”

So he was going to keep up with this ‘Doctor Lecter’ business was he? Could this day get any worse? “Ballast isn't backup, Will, nor will it keep you from getting eaten by a shark.”

Will sighed and set down the harpoon gun. “That seems inevitable doesn't it? The shark, the Ripper, or whoever comes after him. I'll never be free as long as Jack is the director of the BAU. I'm dinner no matter what I do.” Will said with resignation.

“That’s awfully fatalistic,” Hannibal said. *‘And wholly accurate, but I mean it to be me and no one else, my sweetest one.’* Almighty God, pet names now? He really was in a bad way.

“It’ll be fine, Hannibal. I’ve asked, Brody to come with us.”

Lovely. More law enforcement. “I’m so glad to hear it,” Hannibal grumbled.

Chapter End Notes

No update next week as I'll be away at a work conference. Hope you enjoyed seeing the kiss from Hannibal's POV. Can't wait to hear your thoughts!

# In Utero

Chapter Summary

Familiar specters new and old haunt Will's thoughts and dreams as the men head out onto the water, and the shark hunt takes a sudden and deadly turn. (Plus, Mer!Hannibal makes another appearance.)

Chapter Notes

Thanks to @Wolftrapqueen27 for beta-ing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The usual dreams plagued Will; death and corruption dogging his every step as he moved from one hazy memory to the next, but they were worse tonight. The feeling of wrongness didn't reset when one dream ended and another began, and Will carried that darkness forward. Each new body he saw and each killer he dispatched, left its mark. He felt dirty, dry, and scarred from the inside out.

In the most vivid of these dreams, Will was onboard the *Jonah* , wrapped in the arms and tail of Hannibal Who Was Not Hannibal. The half eaten body of Vanessa Shaw, victim number five, lay nearby. In the dream Will had killed her by slitting her throat with his fishing knife although you would never know it by looking at the body. After giving the body to the merman to devour no evidence remained of his involvement. Vanessa shaw had been reduced to her base materials. She was meat now and nothing more. He wanted to feel guilty afterwards, but found he could not. There was an emptiness within him where the guilt should be. He felt bad about it, but only briefly. The merman's soft snoring drew him away from those thoughts and filled him with peace. If not for the body, everything would be perfect.

Vanessa’s matte grey eyes were fixed on the pair in judgement as Will gently stroked the back of the merman’s neck with his knuckles. Unlike the merman, Will didn't need to feed from the body; he had already taken what he wanted foom the act of killing and now shied to be alone with his lack of feelings. He could close her eyelids or dump the body overboard to be rid of the reminder, but moving meant rousing the merman and he didn't want that either. Being near the creature made Will feel less monstrous by comparison, and that felt good. It felt great in fact! If only it could stay like this forever, but Will knew it could not. Already things were changing inside of him past the point of turning back. It was only a sense of duty that made him resist. He still had a job to do, an important job. It was a job he couldn't do if he changed now. He needed to protect...protect...something.

The sun was warm and bright, but the merman's shark skin felt cold and rough against his legs. Will itched where the denticles on the merman's hide rubbed against bare skin. He felt like a lizard ready to molt, and he wanted to scour himself clean of the dead flesh. But Will wasn't sure what he would be once he shed his old skin for the new, so he tried to stay as still as possible and not make the damage worse. Would he be able to feel this same peace if what was outside finally matched what he feared had taken root from within? Maybe it would? *'Or maybe it would feel better,'* whispered a dark thought. 'What do you want from this?'

As soon as the question was asked, his mind shied away from it and returned to counting the vertebrae that extended down merman's back.

The merman nuzzled into his neck and interrupted Will's reflections with a low and sleepy chirp. It would have been cute if not for the blood covering his neck and maw, but despite the off-putting viscera, Will reached for the merman's face and tilted his chin up.

*'What do you want?'*

The merman woke from his slumber slowly, but eventually the cold-blooded animal opened his eyes for review. His black eyes were as horrifyingly beautiful as the first time Will had seen him; the only thing that changed since then was Will and how little he cared about the creature's lack of humanity this time. Had that only been two days ago? Christ, what was happening to him?

Will ran this thumb across the merman's upper lip and swallowed. Beneath the fatty tissue, he could feel the hard, sharp incisors that remained hidden unless the merman smiled.

The merman blinked twice and pressed his lips into Will's hand. Was that encouragement? It was hard to say. Mersharks weren't covered in any books he knew of.

*'But what do **you** want?'* The thought pulsed like a heartbeat inside his skull, and warmth gathered in his stomach. The merman must have sensed the change because the merman suddenly rumbled in that pleased way and knowing way. The sound sent a shiver coursing through Will's body like static shock; it was happening again. Will felt himself caught by the malignant undertow that would drown him if and when when he finally lost control.

But this time he didn't care.

It was only a sense of duty that made him resist. He had a job to do, an important job. It was a job he couldn't do if he changed. He needed to protect...protect...something. What was it again?

Will let his hand drift to the merman's cheek and pulled the monster's face forward. Once in motion, reluctance became eagerness, but before their kiss could be consummated, a voice interrupted them.

"Will?"

It was one word spoken in a deep and heavily accented voice, and it yanked Will back from the darkness like a bungee cord. The transition back was disorienting, biting, and frenetic. It

was the emotional equivalent of the bends, to put it in diving terms, and a wonder that Will didn't vomit all over the deck.

The merman rose up onto his hands and hissed at the intruder revealing those sharp and pointed teeth of his.

Will pushed the monster to the side, and twisted his body towards the sound of the voice.

Hannibal, the real Hannibal, loomed above the pair looking anything but dull and lifeless. Jealousy and anger twisted his mouth into an inelegant grimace, and the pain inside his eyes shined as bright as a candle. “Is this how you see me?”

With the silence broken, time reversed and Will found within himself the ability to feel horror again. His values and decency knit themselves back together, cracked but present and too late to avoid disaster. He had willingly chosen a monster over the one friend who had only ever shown him kindness. How fucked up was that?

“I can explain!” Will said and reached for Hannibal’s ankle.

But Hannibal drew back. “If I had known that this was how you wanted me, I could have shown you a different face. Why didn't you tell me?”

*‘Because I didn't know!’* Will wanted to scream. *‘I don’t know what I want or what to say! I never do! Hannibal! I need you to tell me!’* But none of the words came out.

“Wait!” was the only word Will could muster, but Hannibal stepped back farther still.

Hands grasped Will’s shoulders and pushed him face first onto the deck. The merman pinned Will down with his considerable body weight. Try as he might, Will was going nowhere with the monster weighing him down. That strong tail, used to propel the merman swiftly through the water, was solid muscle.

“Hannibal…please. Don’t leave me!” Will pleaded and tried again to reach his friend, but the merman yanked Will’s arm away and twisted it behind his back.

Will screamed in sudden pain. The merman merely lowered his mouth to Will’s ear and tisked a note of irritation and reprisal, unconcerned by the injury he was doing to his companion.

“Be more careful, Will. When you lie with monsters, there are always consequences,”

Will looked up into Hannibal’s face; remorse and guilt spilled out of him like blood. And when Will thought it couldn't get worse...it did.

Hannibal’s cognac eyes filled with black growing as dark as the monster’s on Will’s back. “Goodbye, Will. I’ll miss you,” Hannibal said but if he was sincere, it was buried beneath the cold laughter that followed on the heels of his farewell.

Will felt the merman's lips curl as he pressed a lopsided smile into Will’s flesh; Will gathered his strength in one last effort to pitch the merman off of him, but it was already too late. Even

as Will surged upwards onto his hands and knees, he felt the merman's teeth sink into his skin, pumping venom into Will's muscles that burned instead of sedated.

Will choked back a scream and crumpled onto the deck, but he resolved to let the merman consume him without further fight. The pain was overwhelming, but it was what he deserved.

...

Unlike most mornings, Will woke up alone with no Hannibal standing over him concerned about Will's latest night terror. He was uncomfortable and cold in his sweat soaked bed sheets while Hannibal did whatever it was he liked to do on deck in the mornings. Will rattled the handcuffs and glared at his reflection in the steel. He was bored, annoyed with himself, and half-erect, but the alternative was to yell for Hannibal and deal with his jokes about American puritism again. Will wasn't sure he was ready for that yet. He wasn't sure he was ready for Hannibal at all.

That last dream had been...**a lot** and difficult to parse. The shark. The kiss. Hannibal. They were all getting jumbled together in his mind, caught up in the same whirlpool Will himself was trapped in. He felt like he was sinking, and the one person whose job it was to keep him afloat couldn't stand to be around him long enough to let him out of his handcuffs.

Will looked out the port window, at the ill-omened red sunrise. "Sailor take warnin'" he said repeating the old seaman's adage with his father's accent. "Little late for that, don't you think?" Above deck, Will thought he heard voices but they were too muffled to make-out who they belonged to. God, he hoped it wasn't Brody. That would be just perfect. He could see it now. Hannibal making apologies while he sipped his coffee for Will's failure to great their guest. '*I'm so sorry Will could not join us. He's chained to his bed below dead because he's either ill or a lunatic.'* Or maybe he was both.

By the time Hannibal deigned to check on him, Will's blood has cooled and he had the beginnings of a plan, a plan that would at least get him through the day.

For starters, Will had decided to call Brody off the bench if she was not already upstairs waiting for him. Her presence would at least force him and Hannibal to attempt to act normal around each other if only for appearance's sake, and maybe by tomorrow this would all have blown over. The extra hand would also allow Will to relieve Hannibal of his chum line duties, which Will hoped might serve as a peace offering. That would do for now. He knew it wasn't enough, but it was a beginning.

When Hannibal left to take his morning shower, Will threw himself into his work, but try as he might, he couldn't get the image of Hannibal having sex with Doctor Hendrix out of his head. Everytime he looked at Hannibal, he noticed some new trace of her etched into his flesh, which created a hole in Will's chest that was slowly filling with a multitude of confusing and conflicting emotions: irritation, embarrassment, loneliness...and...something else he'd rather not think about for too long.

Brody arrived after breakfast. Preparations flowed much more smoothly after her arrival and the three departed thirty minutes later when all the gear was ready.

They motored out to the same spot where they had seen the shark two days ago and started chumming the waters. It was a long morning. Nothing took the bait until it was almost lunchtime and even then it was only a middling blacktip.

“It is a poor substitute for our shark, but at least it is something. Can you hand me the bolt cutters, Will?” Hannibal asked while holding the shark out of the water.

Will walked the tool over to Hannibal, but as he looked at the young shark slowly suffocating on the end of the line a memory returned to him, a memory of his father. He felt suddenly sick and sweaty, but he was also sure about what he needed to do. Will passed the bolt cutters to Brody and drew his knife instead.

“Will?” Hannibal asked but his voice was a million miles away. It was his father’s voice who was the loudest in Will’s mind.

*“They're cannibals, son. The kill and eat their siblings in the womb. How’s that for family?” Liam Graham said as he handed the knife to his nine year old son.*

*“They ain't like us, kid. We’re a real family, and family always looks after their own,” his father's best friend Dennis said. “Now come here and stick this little bitty like we showed ya.”*

At nine, it was easy to pretend that the shark’s black eyes looked lifeless, like a doll’s eyes. Killing the creature felt less repulsive that way. As an adult, Will had seen more than his fair share of bodies and knew better. There was no comparison between dead things and living things. The shark’s matte black eyes were not empty merely full of shadows, but it was very much alive.

Will steadied himself against the railing and laid the tip of his knife against the shark’s belly. The blade was almost camouflaged against the shark’s gunmetal skin until blood blossomed beneath the sharp edge. The shark began to thrash following the first prick. The sensitive skin and nerve endings, which allowed it to detect the movement of potential prey at a great distance now sent panicked signals to its brain. Will did not want to be crueler than he needed to, so he buried the blade in its flesh and with a quick swish, tore the shark open vertically.

“WILL!?” Brody shouted while Hannibal stood stock-still watching the shark's organs tumble out of its body like laundry falling from a basket.

The knife clattered onto the deck, soaked with gore, and Will motioned for the bolt cutters. He cut the steel line and dropped the bolt cutters beside the knife. The dying beast slipped into the water with a loud splash and blood blossomed around its body.

Hannibal’s head turned like a wind vane on a stormy day unsure where he should direct his analytical mind. His attention was evenly split between the commotion in the water and Will, and Will was almost positive he heard Hannibal mumbling in his native Lithuanian.

Brody however had only one object in her sights, Will...Will whom she regarded now with horror. “What was that for!?” she shouted.

“Look,” Will instructed and pointed down at the water.

They both looked, but Hannibal leaned out so far over the railing that Will worried he would fall over. Will’s fingers itched to slide themselves through Hannibal’s belt loop to keep him safe, but he worried about crossing any physical boundaries after their kiss.

Meanwhile, the shark thrashed just beneath the surface of the ocean at the center of a thick cloud of blood. The poor creature’s mind was so consumed by its own hunger, it didn't even realize it was dying. Its jaws snapped at pieces of intestinal gut that floated nearbye, which passed through the shark's mouth and popped out again from the hole in its stomach.

“Fascinating,” Hannibal said with the voice he normally reserved for fine pieces of music.

Will knew he’d enjoy the show. This kind of morbidity was right up Hannibal’s alley. It wasn't up Will’s alley. Not anymore. Not since Dennis died.

It wasn't long before another dark shadow floated up from the deep. It was another blacktip that approached looking non-pulsed as it swam over and nosed at the torn belly of its brother. But the shark was not here to help. The healthy shark opened its jaws and took a bite out of the other blacktip with no more effort than a kiss. It swam away, but two more similarly sized sharks followed behind it.

Brody wheeled away from the deck looking like she might vomit. “Jesus Christ! They’re eating it!”

“They’re cannibals in utero,” Will explained. “They eat the bodies of their brothers and sisters in the womb. I think some part of their brain still remembers the struggle...and the taste.”

“This is marvelous, Will! Hieronymus Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* as interpreted by Darwin.”

“This is only the beginnin’,” Will said aware of the twang in his voice. *‘I sound so much like my father,’* he grimaced. He had told Hannibal once that he had never felt attached to the concept of family, but clearly family had grown an attachment to him. “Bring me a harpoon, one of the large ones.”

Hannibal did as instructed, and with harpoon in hand, Will speared three more small sharks tossing each one back after he had stuck it. Soon the surface of the water was roiling with the frenzied feeding of dozens of sharks of all shapes and sizes.

Will leaned against the harpoon unable to stand and bare the weight of his body and disgust all at once.

“I’ve never seen a more remarkable animal,” Hannibal exhaled appreciatively. “And you, Will, you--,” Hannibal’s expression shifted when his attention fell on Will. Reverence changed to concern, and it made Will itch. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. I just don't like fishin’--I don’t like ***fishing*** this way.”

“You use live bait when you fish for trout. Do you not?”

Will opened his mouth to explain, but it was Brody who answered. “This is different. We are using another predator as bait. It feels….wrong.”

Will gave Brody a small and gracious smile. Clearly they shared another hobby beyond detective work. More and more Brody was beginning to feel like his good twin.

“It should make you feel powerful. The shark is a magnificent killer, but here we have weaponized its hunger against it.” Hannibal countered and turned back to watch the roiling Atlantic. “It's terrible, Will, but also remarkable. Truly remarkable.”

“No, it's just terrible,” Brody said.

Will rubbed the bridge of his nose fighting the headache that was forming. He didn’t know whether to agree with Hannibal or Brody. His empathy was pulling him in two directions at once. Will sat down in the fighting chair and put his head in his hands. “It was necessary."

“Where did you learn this, Will?" Hannibal asked.

“My father showed me how to do it. My father and his friend Dennis,” Will said into the palms of his hands.

“Will?” Brody whispered and laid her hand on Will’s shoulder. She shook him gently until he would look up again. “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to judge you. I’m just...I’m just not as used to this kind of thing as you are.”

Will made eye contact. Brody had a comforting and mothering about, but beneath that warmth, Will saw fear. “I’m not used to it either,” he said defensively.

“That’s a relief,” she said but Will sensed no relief in her.

“Ahem,” Hannibal coughed. “Not to interrupt, but the show seems to be over, quite suddenly too.”

Will got to his feet in a hurry. “Quick! Help me with the cage. I think our leading lady just arrived.”

…

Hannibal fussed about Will’s safety one last time before Will entered the water with large shock stick, but he intended to use the weapon in another way entirely. At the end of the stick there was a needle filled with poison. His plan involved luring the shark into attacking the cage so he could stick the beast in the mouth and deliver the poison. Brody was assigned to keep watch and distract the shark with one of the harpoons attached to the yellow barrels if she got a good shot. And Hannibal was again relegated to the chum line, much to his dismay.

It was comforting being in the water. Here the heat could not touch him, and the only things that moved were light and shadow. Occasionally black blood and gore would float by as Hannibal ladled bait into the water, but for the most part, Will was alone with his thoughts.

But all good things must come to end.

A large shadow drifted towards him, and bit by bit, it coalesced into the form of the monster shark. She was exactly as large as Will had predicted, at least twenty-two feet of sheer power, and unexpectedly beautiful. Her hide was more silver than gray and marred in places by thick white scars that looked like adornments on her instead of injuries. Will forgot about the weapon in his hands as she made her first pass and smiled with those many rows of sharp, pointed teeth.

This was their maneater?

This was who he had come to kill?

The shark turned and disappeared into the dark water, but she hadn't gone far. Will could sense her. She was out there, and she would be back. *'And I will be ready.'*

Or so he thought.

Will felt the cage shake. The attack had come from below. He looked down and expelled a panicked shout through the regulator. The shark's jaws were open around the base of the cage and reaching for him.

He stared down into the belly of the beast and lost his sense of time and direction. He knew he should act. Either kill the beast as planned or swim out the escape hatch at the top of the cage and make it back onto the *Jonah* before he became lunchmeat. Instead he watched the contractions of those mighty jaws with morbid fascination as they opened and closed around the metal bars.

*'Bend and break,'* he could hear the animal roar in his mind. *'Break and eat. Eat and live.'*

And then the beast pulled back and wheeled away faster than Will thought possible for an animal as large as she was.

Will had only enough time to pull the panic cord that was attached to a bell onboard the *Jonah* before the cage shook again.

This time the shark attacked from the side and had its jaws hooked around one of the floatation devices and the large horizontal gap in the bars. The shock of the blow caused Will to drop the shock stick, which slipped through the metal bars and disappeared into the deep. Defenseless, Will's fear quadrupled as one of the fastenings began to bend. The cage was breaking apart!

Something hissed through the water and was shortly followed by a cluster of three softer sounds. *'Gunshots'*, Will's mind registered. Brody had missed with the rifle and resorted to her sidearm. Considerate, but useless under these circumstances. Will swam to the second escape hatch at the bottom or the cage.

Sharks had poor eyesight, so the beast didn't see Will's desperate attempt to escape his metal coffin. He was safe so long as the shark was still occupied with the cage, but in open water,

he had no protection from the beast. Will swam for the boat and ripped off his mask and regulator when his head broke through the surface.

“Ladder!” he shouted and flailed in the water. Adrenaline made him clumsy.

Brody raced for the stern of the boat, but Hannibal leaped onto the gunwale with a harpoon in hand and dove directly into the water.

“HANNIBAL!” Will shouted and corkscrewed in the water looking for his friend.

Will felt pressure around his waist, and for a terrified moment thought it was the shark about to bite him in half. But the pressure solidified into an arm, and Hannibal’s head popped up above water.

“I’ve got you,” Hannibal growled into Will’s ear and pulled them both toward the boat.

Relief lasted only so long. Although they were nearly to safety, Will soon felt the electric current pass through his body as the shark sounded on them. “She’s back."

“BEHIND YOU!” Brody shouted.

Hannibal released Will and pushed him towards the boat. “Go!” he roared.

Will obeyed Hannibal although later he would wonder why and would feel guilty about abandoning his friend. But in **that** moment, Hannibal was Hercules and Achilles combined, and Will would have gone anywhere he commanded.

Will reached the ladder and pulled himself up onto the transom. “Give me your gun,” Will shouted.

But Brody was already emptying her clip into the water at the shark.

Will turned around sure that he was about to watch his friend get eaten just like Alana almost had in his dream.

The silver fin broke the surface of the water followed by the gaping maw of the beast.

Hannibal looked like a yellow flower petal floating on the surface of the water compared to the great fish. He still held the harpoon in his hands, and when the moment came, he shoved it into the shark’s maw at an upwards angle.

Wounded but not mortally so, the shark broke off its attack. It cut left and descended into the water.

Hannibal immediately began to swim for the boat while Will shrugged off his scuba tank and fins.

As soon as Hannibal’s hands were on the ladder, Will was dragging him into the boat by the collar of his shirt.

They got tangled up in each others limbs and fell as one over the gunwale onto the deck of the *Jonah*, whole and alive.

Hannibal's hands were all over Will's body checking for injury. "Are you alright? Are you hurt!? I feared I had lost you!"

Will rolled Hannibal over onto his back and shook him since he still had fistfulls of Hannibal's shirt in his hands. "Are you insane!? What the hell were you thinking!? You just tried to fight A FUCKING SHARK!"

When they ran out of breath to shout at each other, they lay entwined and panting against each other's chests. Hannibal had his arm around Will's waist, but Will was too tired to worry about physical boundaries at the moment.

Brody collapsed onto her knees beside them; the gun clattered out of her hands. "Remind me again: which one of you is supposed to be the psychopath?"

"He is" the two men said in unison.

They looked at each other, at how they held each other, and how little it mattered except to assure the other that they were alive. The tension that had existed between them since the kiss was gone. Both men broke out into smiles. They could get through this. Their friendship (or whatever this was) would survive.

Will let go of Hannibal's shirt and placed his forearms on the deck bracketing Hannibal's head. He felt an absurd about of pride for the stuffy socialite. Who knew Hannibal Lecter was such an ass kicker? "You do realize that in one month's time you've killed a serial killer and fought a great white!"

Brody whistled. "Is he in ANY way related to Chuck Norris because if so, I've got to tell you, I'm a big fan."

Hannibal looked at Brody and then up at Will with a question in his eyes. Will braced himself. He knew what was coming as sure as he own name.

"Who is Chuck Norris?" Hannibal asked with genuine ignorance.

Will lowered his head onto Hannibal's chest and laughed until he choked.

"I'll give you twenty bucks if you text Abigail tonight and ask her," Will offered. "We'll rent whatever she suggests."

Hannibal rolled his eyes. "I don't need your money, Will. But if you will get rid of the blue shirt with the hole in the sleeve, then it is a deal."

Chapter End Notes

The scene where Will cuts open the shark to use as bait is one that occurs in Peter Benchley's novel. It's probably my second favorite scene in the whole book, and I wish it had made it to the movie. The original line being: "the flesh pulled apart, and bloody entrails-white and red and blue- tumbled into the water like laundry falling from a basket."

And I hoped you enjoyed Mer!Hannibal's return! In case you missed it the first time, do check out the awesome illustration Nimlock did of him from Chapter 10.

# Promises

Chapter Summary

It's a time of reflection for the crew onboard the Jonah as they plan their next moves. But who is the predator and who is the prey in this scenario?

Chapter Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How is he?” Brody asked when Will joined her topside after putting Hannibal to bed.

“He’s in shock. I got him to take his shoes off before he passed out, but I think we should head in,” Will said looking down at the floorboards where Hannibal was resting below deck after their ordeal.

“And then what?”

“I don’t know. Help me with the cage, will you?”

Together with Brody, they raised what was left of the cage back into the boat. Will felt sick looking at the mangled heap of metal and inspected the cage. Although a twenty-two foot shark was pushing the limits of the design, Will had not expected his protection to fail so spectacularly. Who was to blame? The construction or the shark?

“You almost bit it,” Brody said and tried to bend one of the ruined bars with her hands. When it didn’t budge, she shivered, and Will mirrored the behavior catching the tremor like one catches a yawn.

“I think ***it*** almost bit ***me***,” he corrected thinking of the strength of the animal that could bend metal like that.

Brody looked at him and smirked. “I see you haven't lost your sense of gallows humor.”

They pulled up anchor and steamed towards port. Will was silent when he was allowed to be, while Brody buzzed around the wheelhouse. She paced and darted in and out of conversations like a hummingbird. It was funny how differently adrenaline affected everyone. It left Will feeling numb, took Hannibal out-of-commission entirely, and acted like an accelerant in Brody.

“I bet nothing like this happens in D.C.” Brody said excitedly from the starboard side of the cabin.

“No, this has certainly been unique.”

“What’s the craziest thing that’s ever happened to you?”

“I don’t think you want me to answer that.”

“Try me,” she said challengingly.

Will shifted uncomfortably. There were so many stories to choose from, and he knew he needed to be careful how he told them. Where did he even begin? Stammets and his mushrooms? The human apiary? “About a month ago, we caught a serial killer who was making cello strings out of his victim’s guts,” he offered but left out the part about the trombonist.

Brody didn’t seem fazed by the image at all. “No kidding? Huh. I guess we missed hearing about that one down here.”

“Be glad. It was grizzly.”

“You know, we had one five years back, a serial killer. He had a thing for college-aged distance runners. They caught him at a Waffle House of all places when one of the regulars identified the victim’s dog. I think that was the only reason they caught him. He kept the dog after he killed her. Took real good care of it too they said. Bought it a little sweater and everything. Can you believe it? I guess even the devil has a soft spot for something.”

Will tightened his grip on the helm. He didn’t like thinking that he and the devil might have the affectation, so Will offered up another story, this time about the angelmaker to divert Brody’s attention and his own. They went back and forth like this for the rest of the trip, exchanging war stories and battlescars. In Brody’s case, those war stories were literal. She had served with honors in Iraq as an MP before retiring from the armed forces. She could have easily gotten a job in D.C. within the FBI or CIA, but she had chosen to come home to Georgia. Brody had lived an extraordinary life, and Will couldn’t deny the stirrings of jealousy in his chest. She was a decorated soldier with a lovely family and a career that gave her purpose. In many ways, she was living the life Will had dreamed for himself when he was a younger man, until it had all begun to unravel after his shooting. *Why can’t I be like her?’* he wondered. *‘Why can’t I hold it together like she can? What’s so wrong with me?’*

“You going to go out tomorrow? Even after what happened?”

“What choice do I have?”

“There’s always a choice, Will. Save them or don’t, but for what it’s worth I'm glad you are one of the good guys,” she said and clapped him on the back. “But I’ve got to wonder how much time we’ve got left. Won’t the FBI be needing you back soon?”

Will snorted. “They have my number if they need me.” He hated to admit it, but it irked him that they HADN’T called yet. He had texted Bev yesterday to distract himself while Hannibal was out screwing Doctor Hendrix, only to discover that everything was fine at the BAU. The science team had already closed the Muppet case and moved on. It was quiet at the Bureau, with no new Ripper updates to speak of. Bev had been much more interested in how his “vacation” was going. A vacation! Hrmph. He had almost died today on this ***vacation***. “Can you stay for dinner? Hannibal won’t be in any shape to cook tonight, but I'm sure I can manage for the three of us.”

“Can’t. Stake out again.”

“You still haven’t caught your litterer?”

“No and it’s damn annoying,” Brody sighed.

“That's a shame. I was going to ask you to come back out with us tomorrow.”

“Why do you even have to ask? I'm coming with you.”

“But you said--”

Brody stuck her fists on her hips and squared off against him. “You’re not facing that thing by yourselves. You and Hannibal almost died today. I'm coming, and you BETTER have two pots of coffee ready for me when I arrive. That’s an order, agent.”

“Aye, aye!” Will saluted but neither he nor Brody could hold a straight face through it.

“Maybe it’s for the best,” Brody said through her laughter. “Vaughn won’t have the chance to corner me at the office if I'm out on the water. He’s gotten more aggressive lately; first about the beaches, then the meth, and now this crap. I don't know who makes me crazier, him or the shark.

Mention of the shark caused the attack to replay itself in Will’s mind and his pulse quickened. Was that how Vanessa Shaw and Ben Gardner died? Christ, he hoped not. During Will’s years of service in homicide and now the Bureau, Will had experienced many kinds of fear. In his FBI reconstructions Will was normally the aggressor. He was less often asked to sink into the victim’s perspective, and until today he had never **been** the victim.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked when another conversation died before it started.

“I’m following several trains of thought right now,” he said as the marina came into view. Will throttled down as they approached a line of anchored boats. Will knew he should feel happy seeing the warm, welcoming lights of the marina, but he did not. Soon it would just be him and Hannibal again, alone with a conversation Will didn't know how to start.

“A penny for your thoughts,”

“I feel restless. When I’m not chasing the shark, I am dreaming about her. I feel like Captain Ahab,” Will did not mention the other dreams where he had been dreaming about Hannibal,

“And that got me thinking about another predator, my white whale—the one I'll eventually return to when this is all done”

Brody’s brows furrowed. “The Ripper.”

Will nodded. “There is a connection between the two.”

“What kind?”

“I’m not sure,” he admitted. “I haven’t made that jump yet, but I know it’s coming. Do you get headaches before a big storm?”

“No, but I broke my wrist when I was a child. Now, I’ve got a permanent weather app in my hand," Brody said and flexed her fingers.

“It feels like that in a way. A stray thought lodges in my brain and grows heavier and heavier until my head feels like it’ll split open. Lately, I can’t stop thinking about failure; at how badly I’m doing at both jobs. The shark and the Ripper have both outsmarted me at every pass. I understand why the shark keeps outwitting me. I’m not an ichthyologist by trade, but I am an expert on killers. So why do I keep failing to catch the Ripper?”

“Any theories?”

Will turned the engine down to the lowest setting as they entered the mouth of the marina, dread weighing him down like a ten ton anchor. “Too many. But the one I keep returning to is that I might have mischaracterized the Ripper. I’ve been thinking about him as a known quantity even though the Ripper is considered something of a rarity in my line of work. An intelligent psychopath is still a psychopath, and I've treated him as such. What if he’s not and I'm strategizing for the wrong animal. I might need to push myself further outside of the box if I'm ever going to catch him.

Brody’s eyes grew dark and worried. “How is someone who kills how the Ripper kills not a psychopath?”

Will scratched his head at a loss for the words to explain. “I can’t answer that. Not yet. Like I said, I'm just pondering some things.”

“Will, if there comes a day when you stop thinking about the Chesapeake Ripper as anything but a psychopath, I need you to promise me something.”

“What?”

Brody put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. “Call Doctor Lecter. Call him immediately and take a temporary leave of absence from work. The Ripper is a monster. It’s just that simple, Will. You can’t let him convince you otherwise.”

*‘Is it that simple?’* Will wondered.

“Promise me, Will.”

“I promise.” He said as they coasted into the slip. “Can you help me tie up? I’d like to let Hannibal sleep a little longer.”

“Yeah, just a minute,” Brody said distractedly and walked to the port side window. Suddenly, she was running out the door with her gun in hand.

“Hey! Wait!” Will yelled and flicked off the engine before following.

Brody jumped over the gunwale, ran across the docks, and boarded the *Orca.*

Glass littered the dock, and half the windows on the vessel had been punched out. Will ran back into the wheelhouse to grab his sidearm, but Brody was already helping a very drunk Quint down from the flight deck.

“Get yer hands off me!” Quint said and shrugged Brody off. “I don’t need yer help, chiefy.”

“Is everything okay?” Will called.

Brody shot Will a look and raised a finger to her lips to shush him.

“Mind yer own business, moptop! Mind yer own business or I'll come over there and mind you,” Quint slurred.

“Quint, he’s just trying to help. Please, calm down. I think you might have a concussion.”

Will withdrew from the conversation and saw to his own boat. But he kept his ears open and his guard up in case Quint tried anything.

“Who did this to you?” Brody asked.

“Sharks,” he growled. “The kind of shark that's got two legs and stink of Dollar Tree cologne.”

“You having money troubles, Quint?”

“Who ain’t?” the old salt said with a tired sigh.

“I'm taking you to the hospital.”

“You’re taking me to the Black Dog, chiefy.”

“Do you---,” Will tried to ask again, but Brody shook her head to indicate that she had anything well in hand so Will went below deck to see to his own irascible patient.

Hannibal was still out like a light. At some point, he must have gotten tired of sleeping in wet clothes because Will found them folded in a pile on the floor. Will picked up the clothing and carried them to the bathroom where he draped them over the shower door to drip dry. He heard Hannibal stirring when he returned, so Will sat down on the edge of his own bed and waited for Hannibal to fully rouse, which didn't take long.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

“Like I went thirteen rounds with a great white shark,” Hannibal grumbled still facing the wall.

“You only went ONE round with the shark. Don’t be dramatic,” Will laughed, but his laughter rolled to a slow stop when Hannibal did not join in. The two men continued to sit silently waiting for the other to break the ice. Will’s palms began to itch as the silence dragged on.

“Will...do we need to talk?” Hannibal said at last.

Will braced his elbows against his knees and folded his hands in front of his mouth. It was obvious they needed to talk; Will just didn't know what he needed to say. It would be easier if he understood what was happening between him and Hannibal other than a general awareness that something had changed since yesterday. “Do you need to talk?” he mumbled across his knuckles. Christ, it sounded childish.

“No. Or at least not yet. I can wait until you are ready, for a little while anyway. When we get back to Baltimore perhaps.”

“You mean in therapy? Won’t that be awkward?”

Hannibal rolled over onto his back.  Bruised and battle-weary, he looked less like the opera-attending debutante, and more like a viking with his salt-straight bangs falling into his eyes, savage and feral. “Unorthodox therapy seems to work best for you.”

“Only me?” Will asked and gave Hannibal a small, wry smile.

Hannibal said nothing but lowered his eyes looking almost embarrassed.

Will fidgeted uneasily. He had gotten used to an obedient Hannibal when they were out on the water, but the dynamic felt wrong in this setting. The space was too intimate. The words were too soft and insufficient to communicate their real weight. It was wrong and backwards, and he wished it would stop! He knew Hannibal was looking to him to lead, but Will didn't know how to read the map. “Yeah, you’re right. Let’s wait. I...I don't know if I can deal with your feelings about me as you deserve, while the shark is still out there. I only have so much bandwidth.”

“Only **my** feelings, Will?” Hannibal said; it was his turn to smile.

Will looked down at his feet recalling again the feel of Hannibal’s lips against his.

“I can wait, for a little while, but there is a time limit on these things.”

“When?”

“I won't say. It would only stress you. You will come to me or you will not. If you do not, it will not change anything between us, Will. You are my friend and my patient, and if ever you

see me as something more...well...we will see then." Hannibal propped himself up onto his elbow. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"YES!" Will responded, eager for an escape from this conversation.

"Are there any leftovers remaining? I'm not sure I am in a fit enough state for our usual fare. My apologies to Chief Brody.

"I ate them," Will confessed eliciting a groan from Hannibal who fell back onto his back.

"Sandwiches it is then. How embarrassing," he sighed.

Will crossed over to Hannibal's side of the cabin and sat down on the edge of *his* bed this time. "I could make jambalaya," he suggested. "As aggressively as you've stocked the pantry, I'm sure I have everything I need."

Hannibal looked at him dubiously. "Real Louisiana jambalaya?"

"Don't get too excited. The lower the bar is, the better it will taste," Will cautioned.

"Do you need help?" Hannibal asked unable to keep the anticipation from his voice.

"No!" Will answered a little too quickly. "I'll be fine. You rest." Following orders in Hannibal's kitchen was one thing, but it didn't take an empathy disorder to know that he would be a terrible sous chef. Will started to rise, but Hannibal grabbed him by the belt loop and pulled him back down.

"Do you promise?" he asked.

"Hmm?"

"That you are fine? I did not get a chance to examine you thoroughly after the attack."

Will didn't look over his shoulder. He already knew what he'd see in Hannibal's eyes and was afraid of knowing how deeply his concern ran. '*Don't fall for me. Choose someone else,*' Will wanted to say because he was a dead man. Today, tomorrow, or a year from now, either the Ripper or something else would drag him under. Hannibal didn't deserve that. He deserved someone like Brody; even Doctor Hendrix would be better. "I promise," Will said and wished he could believe it himself.

…

Hannibal lay in bed basking in the smells slowly filling the cabin. He longed to be outside with Will watching him delicately devein the shrimp for their meal, but he knew he could not. He knew would not be able to stop himself from taking a heavier hand with the cooking, and Will needed space for this task. Serving dinner to a friend or loved one was an intimate thing. It deserved privacy. Hannibal dared not introduce any element of pressure that would render the experience inauthentic. So he lay back, breathed deeply of the heady Cajun spices, and projected his imagination out into the other room where it clung to Will like a shadow.

But time kept slipping free of its mooring, and the roar of the ocean replaced the clang of a kettle as Hannibal left the present behind him and replayed the afternoon in his mind for the tenth time. He remembered the weight of Will on his chest, the acrid smell of salt and fear dripping from his curls, and the sound of his laughter drowning out his thundering heartbeat. But what Hannibal treasured most was the memory of Will's hands clinging to the collar of his shirt like it was a life vest. Hannibal placed his own hand around his throat stroking the places where Will's knuckles had brushed his skin. He had not imagined Will's need back there, and now, Will was agreeing to talk about whatever this was that was developing between them when they were finally back home. That was magnificent progress!

He could hear Will shuffling around the other room, muttering about the ways in which Hannibal had stocked the pantry, and likely tugging on those unruly curls of his in abject frustration. Hannibal rolled over onto his stomach, and buried his face in his pillow, conscious of the heat dusting his cheeks. He could have pressed the issue, but truth be told, Hannibal was in no fit state to have either conversation tonight--not when he felt like this. It was embarrassing how much Will's physical proximity and touch affected him, but it was hard not to be aroused by all these sudden changes. He thought about masturbating, but worried Will would return to mother him some more while he was occupied. So Hannibal ran mathematical equations in his head to cool his blood, and when that didn't work, he began to silently recite Frederick's latest article in the Journal of American Psychiatry.

What a difference a day made. Yesterday, Hannibal had seen no way forward. Today, an entirely different future was beginning to take shape--one with Will in it in every way imaginable and not just as a companion in crime.

He turned his face towards Will's empty bed. After all these years, Hannibal had finally let love back into his heart, and if he was going to have to endure all the trouble it would bring him, there was no way he was going to be denied. "You will be mine," Hannibal vowed to Will's lingering presence. "This I promise you."

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: the story Brody tells about the serial killer being caught at Waffle House is a true story that ended in my hometown 15 minutes down the road from where I lived.

# The Things We Covet

Chapter Summary

Will recalls a quiet day on an empty country road, a day that would set the course of his life and undo the first latch on a locked and lethal door, and Hannibal wakes up on the wrong side of the bed.

Chapter Notes

Beta'ed by @Wolftrapqueen27

A chorus of cicadas chittered in the trees singing harmony to the gravel crunch beneath the Chevy's worn tires as it bounced down an old logging road. Will lay at the bottom of the truck bed clutching his knees to his chest dreading the moment when the truck would roll to a stop deep in the heart of Bayou. Two choices lay before him, both alike in dreadfulness, so Will did what he always did in these cases and retreated inside himself. Safe within the replayed memories of happier times—long days at the library, Sundays with Dad at the boat yards (when he was sober), fishing...well, maybe not fishing. Not today and perhaps not ever again after what had happened.

Will felt the truck shift gears and slow as his dad pulled the vehicle into a thick copse of trees; he clutched his knees tighter. *'Run!'* Common sense told him when the truck came to a complete stop. *'Run now before it's too late!'* But there was that other voice urging him to stay. Its reasons were logical too: *'your dad will beat you if you run; where would you even go; child services will lock you up for what you did (or didn't do); you can't escape...not ever, not you,'* but Will knew they were only excuses. He had another reason for staying, simple curiosity, and it weighed on him heavier than all the rest. Was Dennis going to die?

*'Of course he was going to die, stupid!'*

There had been blood all over the beach, so much blood. Dennis needed a doctor, but there were obviously no doctors out here. Yeah, Dennis was sharkbait.

What happened to people when they died? At nine years old, Will had only seen fish die, but fish weren't people. Would it be different? Feel different? Suddenly, Will needed to know more than he needed to be safe. Slowly he uncurled his body, and like a little garden snake, slithered up to the cabin window as quietly as he could manage.

Dennis was passed out in the passenger seat with an empty bottle of whiskey cradled beneath the arm the tiger shark hadn't taken. His chest rose and fell in uneven swells beneath a thick coating of blood. He was still alive, albeit barely. Miracle of miracles. Will knew they should have gone straight to the hospital, but his dad had told him that Dennis could only go to a *special* doctor—one who knew how to keep his mouth shut *'like a certain smart little boy ought to too.'* Will never asked about the hospital again.

Liam Graham gripped the steering wheel with white knuckles and rested his face against the horn. His shoulders shook at odd intervals suggesting that he was crying, but Will did not dare ask if he was okay. His dad usually only cried when he drank, and those nights rarely worked out in Will's favor.

Eventually, his dad pulled himself together. He wiped his face with his free hand and twisted towards Dennis. Will held his breath as his father began to untie the tourniquet from around his best friend's arm, and Dennis woke with a start.

"What are you doing?!" Dennis shouted. "No! Liam! You can't!" Dennis threw a weak punch to fend off his "friend" but his movements were slowed by the blood loss. The punch connected only after Liam had slipped the tourniquet over the stump of his ruined arm, too late to do any good. Dennis thrashed in the passenger's seat, blood pouring profusely from the wound now.

"Shhh, shhh," Liam said grabbing his friend's shoulders. He leaned over Dennis and held him down with his own body weight. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Dennis, but I've got to protect my boy. They'd take him from me. This is for Will. I've got to protect him. I've got to...I've got…I'm sorry."

At the mention of his name, Dennis's gaze found Will's peering into the cabin of the truck. Dennis's green eyes grew sharp and bright as his body's remaining reserves of adrenaline flooded his central nervous system.

"Help" he croaked.

Will felt tears in his own eyes brought on by a feeling he didn't fully understand. Was this powerlessness? *'I should do something,'* but surely his dad would try to stop him, whatever he tried, he reasoned. What could he do except watch and wait until he was crushed by the force of his guilt?

His dad looked up into Will's round face, and did not flinch away from the dewy eyes of his son. "It's a mercy, William. A mercy."

"Liam…Will," Dennis pleaded to deaf ears. Then his eyes, which were wild and white only a moment ago, emptied like water being poured from a glass, and Will knew he was watching a man die. It was like nothing Will had ever seen before, and it was admittedly...beautiful.

…

Will woke on his own in darkness from a repeat performance of a dream he'd had two nights ago. No, not a dream, a memory, he reminded himself. Not all nightmares could be laid at the

feet of ”mental illness” even if Hannibal was right about Will’s recent *difficulties.*

Dennis.

Will honestly had not thought of him in years until this trip. He had watched him die, gotten away with it, and it hardly seemed to matter. What did that say about the kind of person he was?

*‘I was a child’,* he told himself. *‘I built a fort and locked the memories away to protect myself.’* People dealt with trauma in strange ways, children especially. That numbness didn’t make him a monster regardless of what he had become since. It would have also helped if his father had been a better parent (or any kind of parent at all.) What kind of father makes their child an accomplice to murder? Will’s chest tightened as Abigail’s face floated into his field of vision. The specter of Garret Jacob Hobbs stood behind her, his hand wrapped around her throat, and behind Hobbs, the Ravenstag.

“No,” Will whispered and banished the warnings away. Garret Jacob Hobbs’ proclivities weren’t Abigail’s. She was a victim like all the others. Elise Nichols. Cassie Boyle. Vanessa Shaw. Dennis McCallan. But neither she nor Will had held the knife that had killed those girls or Dennis. It was their fathers who were the monsters, *their protectors* , and if that had screwed Will up for life, well, he’d be damned if it ruined Abigail too. He WOULD protect her.  Granted, it would be a lot easier if she would let him help. Despite Will’s best efforts, Abigail kept him at arm's length, yet Hannibal never had any trouble with her. What was his secret? It probably helped that he wasn't crazy.

Yeah.

Wouldn't that be nice?

Will rolled onto his side and studied his therapist, friend, and would-be protector (maybe more if Will allowed it). Will knew he was doing his best to keep Hannibal at arm’s length too. But what Will was wrong and Hannibal could help? What course of action would a doctor like Hannibal Lecter recommend? Conventional wisdom would suggest taking a leave of absence from the Bureau until he got his shit together. Maybe a prescription for something. That would be sensible, and it would be better for the team, better for him, better for everyone.

And in all that time, the Ripper or worse would still be out there waiting—killing—while Will adjusted to a new normal. He clicked his tongue in irritation. He couldn't “take a break,” not now. Not when he was. So. Close.

But maybe there was another way. Something unorthodox. Something only Hannibal could think of. He was a genius in his field after all. Surely Hannibal Lecter could find a way to fix what had been broken inside of him years ago, without requiring Will to retreat from the little life he built for himself and held dear. Honesty would be required, no more lies of omission, and that could get uncomfortable. Shit like Dennis and the abuse he’d suffered as a child would undoubtedly come up. He knew Hannibal suspected some of it. The way Hannibal circled around certain topics was like a shark scenting blood in the water. How much longer could Will afford to keep him out?

Will flexed the arm that was chained to the bed with the restraint he had now brought to Hannibal two nights in a row. The first time had been a peace offering. The second time because he'd prefered peace with some discomfort, over fighting. *'Maybe I want to be uncomfortable. Maybe I could get used to this.'*

How much could he get used to?

"Hannibal," Will said softly, but Hannibal did not stir. An open prescription bottle sat next to his nightstand. Will knew they contained a sleeping pill, which meant Hannibal would be out cold until morning. Will swallowed his insecurities and closed his eyes. Who was he kidding? Honesty would only get him fired or worse. "Go to sleep," he told himself, "you'll feel different in the morning."

...

Brody arrived at sunrise, stepping off the *Flica* and right onto the *Jonah* without a break. Will didn't ask how her stakeout went. He knew by her posture and downcast eyes that the Tybee Island Litterbug remained at large. He'd seen Jack walk the very same way whenever another Ripper lead flamed out.

"Why don't you go below and rest? Hannibal and I can take the boat out and set up the lines by ourselves," he suggested.

"I may take you up on that offer," she said hiding a yawn behind her fist.

"Please do, Chief Brody, and as the ship's doctor, I must insist. You ought to be alert and rested if you are to be of any use to us," Hannibal said as he climbed down the ladder from the top deck where he had been sketching. He was dressed in his more customary tight fitted crew neck, but the bucket hat had made a surprise reappearance. Will thought it strange until he noticed how the hat provided just enough shade to obscure the fading bruises on his neck. *'So that's how he's chosen to hide it today,'* he smirked. Because God forbid Hannibal Lecter wear the same collard shirt two days in a row.

"Alright, alright. Geez. Someone is awfully pushy in the mornings. Is he always like this?" Brody asked.

"Since the day he was born, I suspect," Will said with a wink to Brody.

Hannibal merely "harrumphed" in reply.

Will followed Brody downstairs to retrieve a fresh cup of coffee from the galley and brought it back to Hannibal.

"Here. Drink," he commanded, "You've been an asshole since you woke up."

"I have every right to be after what you put me through this week," Hannibal grumbled as he took the coffee and sat down on top of a yellow barrel to drink it. When Will flinched, Hannibal spat it back up looking aghast. "No, I did not mean...I wasn't talking about….not about THAT! I was speaking of the shark specifically! My apologies, I am groggier than I

realized and am apparently more prone to rudeness than I realized, Will," he said in a rush of words to assure Will he had not been referring to their kiss.

Will's shoulders relaxed. "But you're okay though? Right? You aren't hurt are you?"

Hannibal's eyes softened. "I am well, if a little sore. Adrenaline makes the muscles stiff afterwards. Are you okay? Your sleep seemed particularly troubled last night."

Will's heart stopped. When had Hannibal taken the ambien? Surely it was before the dream about his father. "Did I say anything last night?" he asked careful to articulate every consonant.

"You say a lot of things when you sleep. What did you dream about last night?"

"Fishing," Will said tersely. It wasn't a lie.

Hannibal regarded Will over the lip of his plastic mug and drank his coffee before saying any more. Four large swallows followed. Will counted each one as he waited for the hammer to fall. "You did say something strange a few nights ago that I meant to ask you about. " *Did we kill him, father?* " That is what you said, Will. *Did we kill him?* Whom did you kill?"

"No one. Just a fish. I used to find fishing upsetting," he lied.

"Because you didn't want to hurt the fish?"

"I didn't want to kill the fish," Will corrected.

Hannibal set his coffee down, only half finished, and folded his hands in his lap. "But hurting a fish is okay?"

Will froze. When Hannibal put it like that, well….shit. It made Will feel like a garden-variety psychopath. Oh, walking back this trip was going to be a delight when they returned to Baltimore. Cruelty to animals was one of the earliest indications of a fledgling serial killer, but it wasn't the act of cruelty that attracted Will to fishing. He didn't think about how he might be hurting the fish. He didn't think at all. Fishing afforded him an escape he couldn't get from anything else, not even from a bottle of fine whiskey. "I don't **want** to hurt the fish, you understand?" Will said carefully. "I'm not...I'm just not like that, okay?"

"What are you not like, Will?"

Something in Hannibal's eyes caused Will to take a step back. Outwardly nothing had changed about him, but internally some thought had clearly clicked into gear. Will could practically see it churning inside his skull winding him up like a toy truck. *'He's probably regretting rubber stamping me for field work and probably regretting kissing me too,'* Will concluded. "I'm not a killer," he said softly.

Hannibal said nothing, but his gaze did the talking for him. Half-accusatory and half-sympathetic, he looked as torn as Will felt. In the distance a church bell began to peal, and the sound woke Hannibal from his examinations. He turned his face in the direction of the

brassy melody and smiled. “A humble sound, don't you think? But no less beautiful in its simplicity.”

For once, Will found himself in complete agreement with Hannibal’s aesthetics as it allowed him an escape from this conversation. “Yeah, okay there Quasimodo. Help me get this boat out onto the water.”

Hannibal stood and bowed. “O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells; Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,”

Will tossed a wet rag at Hannibal that reeked of salt and fish guts. “We had a deal. No Witman before 11 AM.”

Hannibal plucked the rag out of the air and folded it up like a pocket square. “It’s 11 AM somewhere as they say,” he said grinning like a shark.

...

They returned to their usual spot hoping that a third time would be the charm. Together with Hannibal, Will set the lines, and fished for little sharks to use as bait. As before, the water became a battlefield as brother fought brother to consume their kin.

Will let Brody sleep through most of it knowing how she felt about the macabre sight. When Will felt his stomach flop for some unknown reason, he knew it was time. Their query was close.

A weary Brody joined them on deck, double-fisting two cups of rich black coffee. “Oh God, is he at it again? I think your therapist needs a therapist,” she whispered with a nod towards Hannibal who was sitting on the transom of the boat sketching the feeding frenzy.

“I have one already. Thank you for your concern, Chief Brody.” Hannibal called back and did not look up from his sketching.

Brody jumped and looked incredulously at Will.

“Hannibal’s senses are extraordinarily keen,” he explained.

“Keen? What the hell? Is he half shark himself?”

“No, just incredibly morbid. It’s what happens when you are read Lord Byron instead of Mother Goose as a child,” Will explained and heard himself echoed by a hoarse chuckle.

“I can still hear you,” Hannibal taunted in good humor.

“We’re aware!” Brody and Will said unison.

Hannibal’s face twitched into a momentary glower. “I think we need to cut up a few more sharks, Will. Our friend seems less eager to join us for brunch today. Care to join us, Chief Brody?”

Brody gagged. “I think I may need a third cup of coffee before I'm ready for that. If you’ll excuse me gentlemen,” she said before departing.

“Does someone **else** need another cup of coffee? Hmm?” Will asked exasperated by Hannibal’s uncharacteristic incivility.

“I’m fine. Unless you need me to do something, in which case, yes, I'll take another cup with a liberal serving of ibuprofen,” he said glaring suspiciously at the chum bucket.

“No, you finish your drawing. I’ll chum the waters for a little while”

“Thank you, Will,” Hannibal said a little too eagerly.

Will began ladling stale blood and tuna over the side of the boat. The scratch of pencil against paper wormed its way inside his skull making Will antsy. He knew he was right to worry. The last time Hannibal had been so withdrawn had been right before their kiss, and while things appeared to be back to pretend normal, the past could not be erased as easily as a drawing could.

“Does Brody remind you of Jack at all?” Will asked to pull Hannibal back from whatever recess he had retreated to in his mind.

“Entirely too much,” Hannibal said, and Will was shocked to see the corner of his lip lift briefly into a near snarl.

“Why do you sound so angry about that?”

“I'm not angry. It’s hot and I’m melting faster than my ice water. Forgive me if I am a bit churlish this morning.”

Will chuckled and closed the chum bucket back up. “That is understating things. Would you like me to get you a glass of wine? We still have that Sauvignon Blanc in the fridge.” He asked and wiped his bloody hands on the front of his shorts.

“No, after what we did yesterday, I’d like to have all my wits about me. Maybe next time I'll think twice before fighting a shark for you.”

“Thank you by the way,” Will said and fidgeted with his watch.

“For what may I ask?”

“For saving me yesterday.”

Hannibal slammed his sketchbook closed. “What’s the matter with you? Last night it was dinner. Today you’ve rescued me from the chum line. You know I appreciate civility, Will, but if you are feeling guilty because I kissed you then--”

“Why do you resent Jack and Brody?” Will cut in to avoid THAT particular subject.

Hannibal's knuckles turned white as he gripped the edge of his sketchbook. “What makes you say that?”

Will walked over to Hannibal and plucked the hat off his head. He cupped Hannibal’s chin with his hand and tilted his head back so he could see his face more clearly. “I’m not sure,” Will admitted and twisted Hannibal’s head to the side so he could look at him in profile. “I thought I saw something earlier, but it’s gone now. You’ve been weird today. Are you sure **you’re** okay with how we’ve left things?”

Hannibal swallowed and gave Will a lingering sidelong look. “I don’t resent Jack,” he said avoiding Will’s second question. “Resentment implies that he possesses something I covet, and I already have everything I need,” Hannibal said as he pulled Will’s hand away from his face, but did not let go immediately. “Jack and Brody belong to a specific cult of virtue, which I find myself at odds with at times as a scholar.”

“What cult is that?” Will asked and tugged his hand free as his palm had begun to sweat.

“Justice, a cult you are precariously close to falling into sometimes.”

“Now ***you*** sound like the psychopath,” Will laughed.

Hannibal blinked but did not otherwise react to the joke. “Hardly that. Justice is an arbitrary construct, no matter what your Bureau professes. In ancient times, theft was punishable by amputation. Today, it is a misdemeanor. Justice is mutable, Will. It is not an absolute; however, Jack carries his justice across his shoulders like a yoke and expects the same of his colleagues. It is an ineffectual managerial style in my opinion. I’d hazard to say you would have already caught your Ripper if Jack allowed you more freedom to pursue him.”

“You’ve fought Jack on this before. I can see the bruises he’s left on your ego.”

Hannibal practically pouted at that. “Jack is a stubborn man, and more intelligent than he pretends to be.”

Will was about to make a joke about Hannibal’s own stubbornness when a horrific sight stopped him cold.

The shark’s conical snout poked up out of the water, just four feet from where Hannibal sat. It was a behavior similar to spyhopping among whales; a way of scenting the air for prey. Will lunged forward, grabbed Hannibal by the collar of his shirt, and pulled hard.

Hannibal slipped both arms around Will’s waist as he stumbled to his feet.

“WILL!? What on earth has gotten--,”

“Shhh, not in front of the company, dear,” Will warned and flicked his head towards the stern of the boat.

Hannibal turned his face to the side and stood cheek-to-cheek with Will, staring into the gaping jaws of their maneater. He drew in a quick, stilted breath and clutched Will tighter. “I didn't even hear it surface.”

“You were lucky. She probably could have grabbed you if she was determined enough. They can jump, you know.”

The shark’s head rolled to the side mocking them with its many rows of sharp teeth before she sank below the surface of the cloudy water. Will disentangled himself from Hannibal’s incidental embrace, and jumped onto the transom of the boat. There was no sign of the shark, but she was out there. Will could feel it in he is bones. “She's gone under the boat,” he said when suddenly something large slammed into the *Jonah* nearly knocking Will into the water.

“What was that?” Hannibal asked his face pale.

“What do you think?” Will replied as a dispassionate coldness settled over him. The challenge had been issued and first moved played. “She knows what we’re about since yesterday, and she’s pissed as hell.”

The statement did nothing to improve Hannibal’s complexion. “I’ll fetch Chief Brody,” he said.

“Yeah, I think you better.”

# Sailor Take Warning

Chapter Summary

It's man vs predator vs shark and Will shows signs of ***going off the deep end.*** (*rimshot* #SorryNotSorry)

Chapter Notes

Beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will hooked a small blacktip on the end of the largest hook he had and dropped it over the side of the boat. He did not give it a long leash. He needed to bring the shark up and close. Brody brought him one of the harpoon guns and took up watch at her own station at the other side of the boat. Hannibal was out of the way, worrying from the door of the wheelhouse and annoyed that he was being kept out of the action.

“Are you sure you don't need me to do anything?” he called.

Will made a gesture with his hand cautioning Hannibal to lower the volume. Not that he thought the noise would frighten away their fish (certainly not this fish anyway) but Hannibal’s help, while welcomed in the autopsy room, had proven to be a distraction in the field on more than one occasion. In the case of Garrett Jacob Hobbs for instance, would they have arrived in time to save Abigail's mother if Will had not been picking up the files Hannibal had dropped on the ground? Even three minutes of lost time had cost a life.

Well today only one life would be taken, and this time there would be no collateral damage, only their intended victim—their shark. Will felt sharp and cold like he had not felt since childhood. Most of all, he felt hungry; hungry to be done with this. There were bigger fish to fry back home.

The plan was simple; lure the shark in with treats and stick it with an iron. The iron itself wouldn't kill the shark. That wasn't its purpose. He had told Hannibal on the first day, during their picnic outside of town, that sharks—lacking the flotation bladders of other fish—needed to keep moving or they died. To kill the shark, they needed to stop her, and to stop her, they would provide what nature had omitted by design—natural buoyancy. Each iron harpoon was attached by a rope to a large yellow barrel. Sensing danger, the shark’s natural instinct would be to run deep, but the barrel would prevent that, bringing the shark up and wearing her out in the process. Will had hoped to avoid this end for the shark.  It was a cruel way to go, long and

tortuous. Even a maneater deserved more mercy than that. But time wasted put lives at risk, Will had no time left for mercy.

He raised the harpoon gun to his shoulder the moment he felt his insides twist in that preternatural way that told him their prey was near. He saw foam first, then spray followed as the monster shark lunged out of the water, swallowing bait and hook whole. Her powerful jaws closed down around the chain as she crashed back into the water. But before she could disappear beneath the waves, Will fired his gun, sticking her with an iron beneath the dorsal fin. The chain attached to the blacktip went slack, the injury startling the shark into dropping its prey. As the shark fled, it took with it a long length of rope attached to a yellow barrel. Rope and barrel went over the side of the boat with a loud splash and disappeared into the deep.

“Dammit!” Will cursed when the barrel did not come back up.

“What happened?!” Hannibal shouted.

“She went under the boat!”

“I thought that wasn't supposed to happen! The barrel was supposed to bring it up!”

“She's too strong! We'll need two!” *Maybe even three* , Will thought. “Do you see the barrel yet, Brody? She can't stay under too long!”

“No, I--wait! There it is off the starboard side!”

Will bolted across the deck. Sure enough the barrel had resurfaced and was leaving the area at a rapid pace. “Hannibal! Crank the engine!”

With Hannibal at the helm, the *Jonah* chased after the shark, which lead them out into even deeper water while Will prepped a second barrel. They were the farthest from shore they had ever been when the shark finally stopped running. Hannibal steered the boat to circle the barrel before cutting the engine and coasting into a stop beside it. “Is it dead?” he asked over the intercom.

“Not a chance,” Will replied from the bow. “Playing dead maybe. We should be cautious.”

The three sharkhunters regrouped at the stern of the boat. Will attached a large hook to a pole from the supply closet and lay down on the transom. He leaned out over the water trying to grab the rope and bring it closer, while Hannibal held his feet to ensure he did not fall overboard.

“What’s your plan?” Brody asked while keeping watch with a loaded harpoon gun.”

“Tie the shark to the boat and drag her to back to the shallows. That should tire her out,” Will said as he fastened the rope around a cleat.

This time there was no warning when the shark leaped out of the water. No foam. No bubbles. Just row upon row of white sharp teeth. Miraculously, the rope held as the shark’s

body came crashing down on top of it, but all was not well. Hannibal had not been mindful of his feet and was caught in the bite of the rope.

“Will!” He cried out. Hannibal was pinned between the rope and the railing.

Will was picking himself up off the deck when the Jonah suddenly listed. “Use your knife!”

“I don't have it!”

“What?!” Will shouted as he scrambled over to Hannibal with his own fishing knife now in hand. “What do you mean you don't have it?” he said angrily sawing at the rope attached to the cleat, which had grown too taught to simply unknot.

“I left it below deck. Argh! Will, hurry!” The rope, which was crowding Hannibal’s left leg against the side of the boat continued to cut into him.

Will heard the sound of a harpoon gun fire and the splash of a second yellow barrel as it hit the water. “Got her!” Brody shouted.

By this time, Will had his own knife out and was halfway through the tough nylon fibers before the rope finally snapped, cutting him across the cheek as it went overboard. Hannibal crumpled onto the deck clutching his injured leg. “Thank you, Will.

Will blew off the praise and dropped to his knees beside Hannibal to check his injury. “Where is your knife?”

“Probably on the nightstand. I forgot to put it into my pocket this morning. Stop poking me, will you?! I am the doctor here, not you,” he complained and rebuffed Will’s hand.

“Fine.” Will spat and rocked back onto his heels. “Are you okay?”

Hannibal rolled up his pant leg and gingerly tested the bruised and chafed flesh where the rope had dug in. He stretched his leg and tested the range of motion in his ankle. Other than a deep grimace on his already stern features he did not seem to be in unendurable pain. “I will mend. Nothing to worry about, but let me look at that cut on your face.”

Will slapped his hand away and got back to his feet. Two could play the role of difficult patient as easily as one. “Did the shark go under again?” he asked Brody.

She nodded.

Will got to his feet and stormed off. He returned with Hannibal’s knife and medical bag, but handed Hannibal the knife first. “A good sailor never goes anywhere without their knife. It can be the difference between life and death.”

“So I see,” Hannibal said looking more smug than Will would have liked, given their latest brush with near disaster. “May I clean you up now?”

Will sighed and sat down on top of the nearest barrel. “As it pleases you, Doctor Lecter.”

…

Brody kept watch while Hannibal patched Will up. The cut on his face was deep enough to require a few stitches and would surely leave a small scar. *'That's where I will kiss him next,'* Hannibal thought to himself as he looked over his work and at the new adorable dimple dotting Will's cheek. To think, just a few months ago, Hannibal was considering how best to get rid of the unnerving little special agent if it came to that. Today, here he was knitting him back together and it felt marvelous. But the experience was not without its own pain points. As beautiful as Will's eyes looked blown wide with pain, Hannibal could not help but notice how warm and wet Will's skin felt. His fever was back, brought on by the stress of the shark hunt and his own decision to let Will's mysterious illness reign unchecked. The guilt weighed heavily enough to dampen his delight. "There. All better," he said woefully as he packed up his supplies.

"Thanks," Will said scratching at the collar of dried blood around his neck.

Hannibal felt his heart constrict and cock twitch, and he rolled his eyes at himself. Seriously, it was like being a teenager again. How embarrassing.

"You okay?" Will asked.

"Fine, but I think I will take that glass of wine now if you don't mind fetching it. I'll keep watch," Hannibal replied.

Will went below with Brody while Hannibal regained his composure through a comparative analysis of Frederick Chilton's worst neckties.

However, Hannibal would not get to enjoy that glass of wine because as soon as Will returned so did their good friend. The yellow barrel popped up first on the starboard side of the boat. Then it was dragged below again only to resurface moments later on the port. The shark taunted them in this way for a few passes before striking out towards the shoreline.

"Hannibal, you're driving. Brody and I will each take a gun," Will commanded.

Hannibal gave chase from the helm while Will called out course corrections from the prow as the yellow barrel was difficult to see in the rough waters from the wheelhouse. With spear in hand and hair flying wildly in the wind like Theseus himself, there was very little that Chilton's ties could do to save Hannibal from himself.

Suddenly, Will raised the harpoon and fired a shot. His hit must have landed because he began shouting delightedly while another yellow barrel was swept out to sea. Quite without warning, however, his celebration ended, and anger made his shoulders hunch forward. Will gave the signal to cut the engine and launched into a string of curses vulgar enough to make even Captain Quint blush.

Hannibal picked up the intercom. "What happened?"

"She went under again!" Will shouted.

Hannibal sighed. What an irritating creature this shark was. He had hoped that today would be the beginning of the end. Instead it looked like it was only the end of the opening act. “I thought you said she would get tired.”

“I WAS NOT PREPARED FOR DEMON SHARK, OKAY?!”

The loud pop of a harpoon gun interrupted Will’s tirade. Hannibal turned around to see another yellow barrel fly over the stern and splash down into the water.

“Whoohoo!” Brody whooped pumping her first into the air. “That's two-two, Suit. Doc! Turn the boat around.”

The trio of barrels were heading back into deeper water, but they were moving slower than before. The *Jonah* was nearly on top of them when they disappeared again.

“Shit!” Cried the collective voices of Will and Brody, and this time the barrels did not resurface.

"She can't stay under with three barrels, not with three," Will mumbled.

They waited.

And waited.

But the shark did not return.

The boat bobbed on the surface of the waves, directionless, save for the current until the sun began to dip below the horizon, staining the ocean red.

Chapter End Notes

> I have another show to attend for work soon, and preparations are slowing me down. Distinct possibility I will miss either next week's update OR the week. Going to try my best not to, but as everything begins to pile up, I sense impending disaster. Who knows! I might be overreacting and there will be no interruptions at all. But I wanted you to be forewarned.

# The Scars We Cannot See

Chapter Summary

The crew trade war stories as they wait for morning to continue their hunt, and in the dark of the night, Will and Hannibal own up to various truths and wade into the muddled waters between them.

Chapter Notes

Back at at last! A bit longer than norm so I hope it is worth the wait. Enjoy!

Beta'ed by @Wolftrapqueen27. Trigger Warning: brief mention of Will's childhood abuse in this warning.

“What do we do now?” Brody asked.

Will checked his watch. It would be full dark by the time they returned, and he assumed Brody still planned to carry on her manhunt for the dreaded Tybee Island Litterbug. “We could go back to port, but I think a better idea would be to stay out here and help you with your stakeout since you won't sleep otherwise. What do you say, Chief?”

Brody smiled. “That's the best idea you’ve had all week.”

“Certainly better than the shark cage,” Hannibal added.

Will wanted to roll his eyes. He wanted to kick salt into Hannibal's face. Losing their prey AGAIN left him feeling bitter and irritable, but some small part of him resisted. He had request to make, and he knew that Hannibal would be much more malleable if that request was made with civility. “Hannibal, can you manage to feed another mouth at the table?” Will asked. Hannibal had no choice in the matter, but Will knew that it was the asking that was important.

“I can manage. Thank you for asking *this* time,” he said in a tone that implied he still held a grudge.

Brody whooped and threw her fist into the air. “Great! But I’ve got to warn you, Doc, your boy has been talking you up all week. Think you're up to the challenge? My expectations are pretty high.”

Hannibal clenched his jaw, and Will was not sure which annoyed Hannibal more; the nickname or the lack of faith in his culinary abilities. “Beyond a doubt,” he said with pained affability.

...

Brody piloted the *Jonah* to the North End and anchored there for the night while Will and Hannibal prepared dinner. The meal was a modest affair by Hannibal’s standards—portobello mushrooms stuffed with crispy goat cheese and pan-seared tuna steaks—but Brody was effervescent in her praise and Hannibal was properly mollified. As a result, he began to entertain. Stories of his travels and anecdotal history lessons tumbled out of his mouth, one after another like the Hannibal of their Baltimore home, and Brody was charmed by all of it.

Will grew quiet, content to watch while Hannibal lead the conversation. The evening was nice and simple. Will hoped that when they returned home, Hannibal might be convinced to host something like this with their friends from the Bureau; a low-key affair with just the science team and none of the outsiders that so often clung to Hannibal like leeches. Or perhaps he could come to Wolf Trap and Will could cook for him one night. It was only fair. Hannibal had cooked nearly every meal since....Will froze. No, that was a stupid idea. The image of Hannibal in his casual crew neck sitting down to break bread over some stewed meat was a step too, and yet the scene was fixed in his mind’s eye. It was a pretty painting, but an unlikely reality. Hannibal wouldn't last ten minutes in his home with all the dog hair, smell, and mess.

Will shook himself free of the fantasy. He might be content to spend the rest of his life fishing out here on the water or back home in Virginia, but Hannibal was destined to return to his waistcoats and parties. Will was a freshwater fish. Hannibal belonged to the vast oceans. It wouldn't work even if he wanted it to.

*‘When did I start wanting it to work?’*

Will remembered agreeing that they would talk about when they got back home and thought they would be talking about how to end this and put it behind them. Had that only been yesterday. The kiss itself seemed like a distant memory now, compared to his current turmoil. It seemed no longer surprising that Hannibal had kissed him. The accidental touches, the compromises, the little treats worked into their meals, all these things had lead to the exchange below deck. They were signs of growing affection, signs Will should have noticed if he hadn't been so preoccupied with the case, but that wasn't the confusing part. Will replayed the kiss in his head and took stock of his feelings, physically and emotionally. No, Will’s confusion centered around the feelings that arose inside him when HE thought about kissing Hannibal AGAIN.

“Will, are you okay?” Hannibal asked catching the scent of Will's anxiety like a bloodhound or a shark.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just digesting,” he responded in a relaxed way while his internal alarms rang at Def-con 4.

“You and me both, brother. I couldn't eat another bite! That was fantastic!” Brody exclaimed.

If Hannibal continued to be suspicious, Brody's praise distracted him and allowed Will to slip off the hook. “That is a pity. I had a dessert prepared, but if you are full, then I guess I should pack it up.” It was not a serious threat; they all knew it. After a meal like that, curiosity required a sample at the very least.

Brody sighed and pushed her plate away so she could rest her head on the table. “You’re trying to kill me.”

“Hardly. You would know it if I was,” Hannibal beamed as he cleared the table.

“Give us a few minutes?” Will asked.

“Of course! Take all the time you need. None of us are going anywhere.”

Will and Brody talked about the shark while Hannibal got to work in the tiny ship’s kitchen. Will explained his theory about territoriality and how the shark might be protecting its nursery. Brody didn't really care either way. So long as the shark died and lifted the curse from her town, she'd be happy.

Hannibal returned later with three individual cakes, handmade and buried beneath a colorful arrangement of fresh berries and creme. “Bon appetite,” he said as he sat back down.

“Thanks, Doc, and thank you both for doing this. I was running on fumes there for a little while. Now I feel like I could take on two sharks AND my little litterbug problem.”

“Not to be dismissive of your important role in saving the planet, but what's the big deal? Surely a little trash in the bay is bad for tourism, but we’ve got the beaches shut down. Why is this so important?”

“You should be asking Mayor Vaughn. He’s the one that's infuriated by the reports that someone has been dumping garbage into the waters around here. He says it’s bad enough being mayor of Shark City and that they don't need anymore bad publicity, but I think it’s something else. Something related to the drug trade. Because the only thing that’s been washing onto the beaches has been bodies.”

“You’re thinking it's not a dump, but a drop? A drug drop?”

“Yeah. The current around the North End is swift. Swimmers get caught in the riptide all the time. We don’t normally get to them until they wash up on the beaches dead, so my theory is that they cook the drugs on land and dump them in airtight packs with a tracking beacon attached. The cargo gets swept out to sea into the waiting arms of the fishermen who are running the drugs up and down the Eastern seacoast for their bosses.  Only, I can't get anyone to confess to it on land, so I'm hoping the sea route provides a greater yield.”

“Do you have any suspects?”

“I think you know I do. What kind of agent would you be if you didn’t?”  Brody smirked.

“Enlighten the rest of us,” Hannibal said.

“Quint. He owes money to whoever trashed his boat,” Will answered.

“Exactly. Cause, you know, ONE malicious shark wasn't enough. Now I've got loan sharks to deal with too.”

Hannibal coughed and laid his fork and knife across his plate. “You may have more than that on your hands I fear. I regret not bringing this up sooner, but I was understandably a little overwhelmed the other day after Will and I nearly ended up on the menu. I saw Captain Quint hanging around the shark cage the morning of the attack. I’m sorry, Will. I should have said something earlier.”

“What?! You don't think he sabotaged the cage? Why?” Brody asked nearly on her feet now.

Hannibal shrugged. “He said he wanted to take a photo for his niece. I never saw him do anything to the cage, but he was behaving strangely.”

“It *could* just be an accident. Quint has no reason to want me dead,” Will countered as he had every reason to be distracted during the construction of the cage. The fault could still be his.

She pondered that and sat back down; a sly smile spreading across her features. “It *could* be an accident, BUT it could also be the attempted murder of a federal officer.”

“You sound far too happy about that, Chief Brody. Did Will do anything to offend you while I was fixing dessert?” Hannibal laughed.

“No, no. Don’t you get it? This gives me probable cause to bring him in for questioning! Quint’s not afraid of drying out in a cell overnight, but I've known him all my life, and real jail time might rattle him just enough to flip on the drug traffickers.”

Hannibal nodded as if he had known Quint all his life too, “Some animals do not fare well in cages.”

Will rubbed the back of his neck, uncertain about this theory that Quint wanted to kill him. *‘Why? Because Quint reminds me of my father? Am I still trying to protect him after all these years?’* he argued with himself. “That might involve us sticking around a little longer.”

“And meanwhile who knows what the Ripper could be up to in all that time?” Hannibal added. There was an odd note of caution in his voice, almost parental and not unlike the tone he took when they were arguing about Jack.

“But you would, wouldn't you? I need you, Will. If Quint really is caught up in this, you can help me put him away. It’s not just killers that ruin lives, you know. These parasites are killing us surely as the shark is. Maybe it's not as sexy as what you do back in Washington, but a testimony can be as lethal as a gun. Help me save my town.”

She sounded so mournful and sincere that Will almost agreed on the spot, until he caught Hannibal’s eye. The set of his mouth was grim, warning him away from agreeing too quickly. Will looked at both Brody and Hannibal in turn before he couldn’t look anymore, but he could feel their eyes on him even when he’d turned his attention to his cake. He hated court,

but there was a certain logic and appeal in what Brody was saying. He could save lives without the violence....

“I’d have to talk to Jack before I could commit my time.”

“Fair enough.” she said letting the matter drop. An awkward silence descended on the group until Brody coughed. She leaned back in her chair and popped a strawberry into her mouth with her hand. There was a challenging glint in her eyes. “You ever been shot, Graham? I’ve been shot, ” she said and pointed to her abdomen.

Will chuckled. He remembered these contests from his time on the force. “Stabbed,” he said and moved the sleeve of his shirt up to expose the scar from the knife wound he had received in New Orleans.

Brody shifted in her seat until she could get her leg onto the table. Will looked over to make sure Hannibal wasn’t having a stroke.

“Shrap metal from an IED on Route Irish,” she said pointing to a wide and puffy scar.

Will lifted his left hand and pointed to a round unimpressive puncture mark with an excellent pedigree. “Bit by a gator. I was six.”

Brody scrunched her nose up and stuck out her tongue. “Okay, I admit; that’s pretty badass, but perhaps you should find another hobby than almost getting eaten.”

Hannibal barked out a short laugh drawing stares from both Brody and Will. “An excellent point, Chief Brody. Try harder to avoid the mouths of large predators, Will.  We would all be grateful.”

“What about you, Doc? Got any scars?”

Hannibal laid his hand over his heart. “Only ones that cannot be seen,” he said mournfully “Now, who would like coffee?”

…

They agreed to take turns watching in shifts so everyone would get some sleep. Will had taken a beach towel to the bow of the boat and spread it out so he could lay down and look up at the sky. He was feeling homesick again after exchanging a few texts with Alana to make sure the dogs were behaving, and staring at the night sky helped. Tybee Island was far enough away from any major city to mitigate the effects of light pollution, so the sky here looked very much like the sky over Wolf Trap. It surprised Will though, when after an hour, Hannibal joined him on deck, dragging a blanket behind him.

“What are you doing up?”

“Chief Brody snores louder than you do. I can’t sleep. Mind if I join you?”

Will nodded and grew nervous as Hannibal settled down right beside him. Will had thought their small cabin aboard the *Jonah* was too intimate, but this was beyond uncomfortable.

They were close enough that Will could smell Hannibal's cologne; inches not feet separated them now. It was unbearable. Will racked his brain for a question that might bridge the gap between them and end this awful silence.

"Why didn't you tell Brody about Budge?" Will asked at last. "I know you walked away with a few marks from that fight."

"When you killed Garret Jacob Hobbs, did you feel like bragging about it later?"

He had a point, and Will felt embarrassed for asking. They both knew Will had wanted nothing more than to put the Hobbs case behind him. "What about your other scars, the ones we cannot see?"

"I don't like to talk about them."

Will frowned. "Can you talk about them? Please?"

"To what end, Will?" Hannibal sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose seemingly annoyed, which meant he was either tired, sunburned, hungry, or all of the above

To be fair though, it was a good question. Unfortunately, Will wasn't all that certain he knew. "Look, you know everything there is to know about me. Fuck, it's what you're paid to do. Meanwhile, what I know about you amounts to little more than my own observations and a few vagaries you've begrudgingly let slip. Don't you think that has created a power differential between us?"

Hannibal rolled onto his side and raised himself onto one elbow. "Do you feel disempowered when you are with me? Do I try and limit your potential in any way? I have only ever acted in your best interests in hopes of seeing you find whatever it is you feel you are lacking." His voice was sharp like the hiss of a steel wire as it was fed through a reel, and there was starlight in his eyes making him appear as if he were on the brink of tears. It made Will feel guilty about calling him a miser with his past, but it was not a point from which he could back down. Something was changing between them, and while Will didn't know what he wanted physically from Hannibal, he recognized that he was drawn to him on an intimate, emotional level.

"Hannibal, I think we both realize there is something developing between us, but I don't think I'll be able to understand myself until I understand you. Talk to me. I need this."

The command hung on the air between them like a dandelion seed on the wind. It twirled directionless, unsure whether it was rising or falling from one moment to the next. "As you wish," Hannibal said at last and looked skyward. "I've spoken to you of my sister before, but what I have not told you is that I **watched** my sister die, Will, and die slowly. My little Mischa, she took ill and wasted away before my eyes. That is the indelible scar I carry on my heart...if you **must** know."

"Christ, Hannibal, I'm so sorry." Will knew Hannibal had lost a sister but not how she died, and all though Hannibal sounded put out about being backed into this corner, it was clear that he was still hurting. Suddenly, his interest in medicine made a lot more sense, as did his

decision to leave a promising future as a surgeon. How wretched must it have been to watch patient after patient die despite all the knowledge and skills he had acquired since childhood? To have come so far and learned so much...for nothing.

“Don’t be sorry. It happened a long time ago. It was winter when we were orphaned. There was no food, and no money for medicine, even had we been able to reach it.” His tone was cold and teeming with repressed anger.

“You were a child.”

Hannibal looked down into Will’s eyes wearing a cross expression on his face. “Regardless, the duty was mine and I failed.”

Will didn't back down although he knew Hannibal wanted nothing more than to change the subject. He needed this. He needed just one conversation where he did all the psychoanalyzing and Hannibal Lecter was on the menu for change. It wouldn't balance the scales completely, but it was a start. “What was she like?”

“At that age, it is hard to describe who a person is. A child’s personality is not static. It shifts and changes with the passing of the wind. Sometimes violent. Sometimes calm. But what I will say of my sister is that she had an artist’s soul and more imagination than anyone I’ve known, until I met you.”

“Did she like to draw?”

“No, she was more literary.”

“Did you read to her then?” he asked hopefully, because there was something so sweet about the image of Hannibal reading to his kid sister.

Hannibal was not staring at Will anymore but through him, and it was not starlight that made his eyes look moist this time. “No, there was never a need. Mischa always had a story to tell of her own invention. I played music for her and sang on occasion when she was sick or tired.”

“You sing?” Will smirked.

“I **sang** to her in a language you wouldn't understand,” Hannibal said rebuffing him with a tone that said *‘this particular line of questioning is over.’*

They lay in silence as the boat bobbed on the choppy waves of the ocean. Somewhere out there was a monster. Somewhere out there was their case. But there on the deck of the *Jonah* , there were only two men with a bucket of feelings between them and no ladle to bring them up.

“Do you mind if I ask my own questions?” Hannibal asked.

Will thought about it and decided not to cede the game board to Hannibal yet. “This is supposed to be about you, but you can ask all the questions you want, if you sing for me,” he said.

“Don't be ridiculous.”

Will elbowed him. “Come on. I promise not to laugh,” he teased. It was an intentionally unreasonable demand, too undignified for Count Hannibal Lecter the Eighth, but there was a vulnerability in Hannibal tonight that Will didn't want to give up just yet; not without receiving a king's ransom in return.

Silence. Then Hannibal sat up and angled his body away from Will. The silence grew and thickened into a heavy blanket, making the air feel warmer around them. Then a low melody inserted itself into the patta-pat-pat drumming of the waves striking the side of the boat. It was a child’s melody, simple and repetitive in a voice that no longer suited its sweet innocence. After only a few lines, it ended. Will didn't need to be fluent in the language to hear the awkward clip on the final note. Whether it was wounded pride or grief that brought Hannibal to heel, Will could not guess without seeing his face, but his heartbreak was palpable.

“That was beautiful,” Will said and laid a comforting hand on the hollow of Hannibal’s back.

“If you recorded that on your phone, I will kill you and let the sharks dispose of your body.”

The wording made Will recall his dreams—where he had done exactly that to his victims. It made him feel guilty and unclean, and it made him determined to keep Hannibal's little secrets. Being tone deaf was far less embarrassing than being crazy. “Your secrets are safe with me, no need to resort to murder,” he said and tugged Hannibal’s shirt wishing that he would turn back around, and Hannibal did turn around looking bemused.

“Are they? I wonder….are they really? Anyway, I have upheld my end of the bargain. It is your turn, Will.”

Will swallowed. He felt like a trout on the butcher's block as he lay belly up beneath Hannibal’s probing gaze. “Shoot.”

“Have ***you*** ever seen anyone die? Not Garret Jacob Hobbs. Not someone you killed in the line of duty. Someone like Mischa. Someone who did not deserve to die.”

“When I was a cop….,” he said starting to deflect but as he watched Hannibal blink away a tear that had been caught on his lashes, the lies died in his throat. Will had asked for honesty, and Hannibal had given it unconditionally. Hannibal deserved as much in return. Will grabbed a fistful of cotton fabric bracing himself for whatever was about to come through the door he intended to open. It was a topic he had never spoken about to anyone. “Dennis. I was there when Dennis died.”

“The man who taught you how to fish for sharks?”

Will tensed. No turning back now. “He taught me how to catch and kill gators too among other things, but what he and my father did wasn’t fishing, Hannibal. It was hunting, and they were poachers. Fixing boat motors didn’t pay a liveable wage. Poaching is how my father earned extra cash after my mother left us.”

A cloud bank drifted in front of the moon ominously plunging them into near darkness when Hannibal asked the obvious question; “how did Dennis die?”

Will drew his hand back and brought it to rest on his own chest. Predictably, his heartbeat raced despite the outward calm he projected, drawing from Hannibal’s example. “It was a tiger shark. There was an accident. Dennis....Dennis got hurt real bad.”

Hannibal lay back down, even closer now, and placed his left hand on Will’s stomach. Will flexed his abdominals, startled by the touch, and forced himself to relax. This wasn't so bad. In fact, he found that he actually liked the weight of Hannibal there. He felt grounded and not in any immediate danger of slipping into the darkest recesses of his mind, despite the violent memories playing behind his eyes.

“We should have taken him to the hospital, instead we took him to the swamp where he bled out. My father said he did it to protect me; that if the authorities found out what he and Dennis had done, child services would take me away. My mom was gone already. My teachers suspected there was trouble at home. Maybe it would have been better if they had taken me away. My father was...well he had bad days.”

“He hit you,” Hannibal offered.

Will flinched. Damn. He’d hoped he’d hidden it better. “You knew?”

Hannibal stroked Will’s stomach with his thumb. “Not until recently. I wondered when you would tell me.”

Will’s skin began to itch under the scrutiny. Did Hannibal expect more? Of course he did. “Can we talk about something else?” Will begged.

“Certainly. Shall we talk about why you haven’t asked me remove my hand yet?”

Will flinched again. “I don't want to talk about that either,” he said and tried to work up the courage to lay his hand on top of Hannibal's.

“Then what would you like to talk about until it is time for Brody to relieve us?” Hannibal said as his hand slowly crept across Will’s stomach finally stopping to curl around his hip bone.

“I--I don’t know.”

“Relax and listen to my voice. If you tell me to stop, I will without hesitation. You are in control, Will. But until then let’s talk about work. That always soothes you. Talk to me about the Ripper. What does *he* want?”

There were few conversations Will wanted to have less than one about the Ripper, but he had already vetoed two of them. “I don't know what the Ripper wants. Hell, I don't even know what I want” Will sighed. He rolled onto his side, his back to Hannibal, pinning Hannibal’s hand beneath him so his arm stayed around his waist.

Hannibal inched closer until Will could feel his chest flush against his back and his breath on the nape of his neck.

“Yes, you do. You’ve lived with him inside your head long enough. Think, Will. You know him. What is his design?” Hannibal asked in a sharp tone that had the effect of activating Will’s imagination. It was authoritative and strong, and it gave him something firm to anchor himself to as he slipped into that grim headspace.

The nightmares rose up to swallow him whole, but this time Hannibal’s presence followed him down. With Hannibal at his side, the sensation did not make him feel like he was sinking. Instead, Will felt like he was returning to someplace familiar. It was dark but familiar, and that made it bearable. Images of the Ripper’s kills and case files flashed in front of him, snapping together like puzzle pieces. “He wants to be noticed and remembered. He doesn't care how,” Will began. “He’s an artist and well read. I bet you’d probably like him if you ever met him. Who knows, maybe you already have at those fancy gallery parties you’re always going to.”

“I'll be more careful in the future. Perhaps you would like to accompany me on one of those evenings? There is a new gallery opening next week. We could look for him together.”

The reconstruction rocked. “What? You...mean like a date? We’re dating now? I thought you said we were going to take things slow, talk our way through this?”

“My offer is strictly professional. You will be miserable at that opening no matter what happens. But if you would allow me to court you, I will make sure our dates are to our mutual satisfaction.” Hannibal pulled his hand back and began to play with Will’s hair. His touch was soft and gentle, the kind of touch Will thought he could get used to.

“How?” Will asked.

“Is this not pleasurable?” Hannibal said and grazed the back of Will’s neck with his knuckles.

“It’s easier than kissing,” he admitted.

“Because I am a man?”

“No…and yes, oh, I don't know? I didn't think I was into men. Then we came out here. I got to know you and now when you touch me, I...I get confused.”

Hannibal was silent for a time, but he did not stop stroking Will's hair. “Are you familiar with the term demisexuality, Will?” he said at last.

“No.”

“I thought not.”

“What’s it mean?”

“It means long conversations over many nights when we are not so sun-sick and exhausted, but in the interim, trust me when I say that there is nothing wrong with how you feel.”

“I’m fine?”

“Have you you been worried you were not?”

“I've been worried. Let’s leave it at that.” His initial worry had been that he had transferred his feelings for Alana onto Hannibal after the rejection. He didn't think that now. This felt different than what he felt for Alana. He couldn't quite explain how. Maybe he and Hannibal were too different. Or too the same? Was it possible to be both?

Hannibal draped his arm over Will’s side once more and squeezed. “Oh, Will, no. You have nothing to worry about. Your experience is natural and valid, and I'm happy you are letting me share even this much with you.”

“That doesn't mean we’re together because I allowed tonight to happen,” Will warned. “I have a laundry list of reasons why this is still a bad idea and needs to stop.”

“I’d like to leave you with something to think about before you make any major decisions about us, and I look forward to arguing the matter further.

Will didn't need to look at him to key into the mischievous intent of his words. It was clear what Hannibal had been angling to do all evening. Equally as clear was that Will was in a place where he would allow it. “You want to kiss me," he stated plainly.

“Well, yes. I acted rashly and without grace our first time, and it has bothered me ever since. Humor my ego and allow me to leave you with a demonstration that is more representative of my skills and affections for you.”

“A demonstration?!” Will sputtered. “God, you are such a narcissist, you know that?” he twisted enough so he could glare over his shoulder.

Hannibal captured Will’s chin between his thumb and index finger. “I am all that, but I am also an *excellent* kisser.

Will swallowed. “Hannibal…I....okay,”

Hannibal’s hand slid down his neck and wrapped itself lightly around his throat.“You never answered my question, Will?”

“Huh?” Will asked fighting to keep his eyes open as Hannibal leaned closer. It was a bad habit of his during physical intimacy; kissing with his eyes closed. But with Hannibal, Will knew he dared not shut him out. Eyes wide open, that was the trick to dealing with Hannibal’s dominant personality. He could be both playful and cruel, distracted and devoted, caring and unsympathetic. Blink and you’d miss which way the telltales were blowing.

“What does the Ripper want, Will? Tell me.” Hannibal repeated and nosed at Will’s cheek.

Will felt pressure as Hannibal planted a kiss across the stitches on his cheek. It hurt briefly, but the pain was replaced by a pleasant tingle after Hannibal drew back. "He wants to be loved."

“How do you know this?” Hannibal asked, and the next chaste kiss landed on the bridge of Will’s nose.

Will’s breath hitched as a piece of the puzzle slid into place. He knew because he wanted the same things; because it was lonely being who he was. Because despite the lack of general attraction to people, Will craved a kind touch; and because he desired a reciprocal, consuming passion from someone who was his equal. However men like him, Hannibal, and the Ripper, had few equals because they were unique. Men like him and Hannibal... ***him and Hannibal.*** Will didn't have to be alone anymore if he just let Hannibal in.

Asking felt like too much, even if he could come up with the phrasing. This was new for Will and not only because of their genders. It was an intimacy unlike any Will had shared with anyone else. He tilted his chin invitingly and felt Hannibal's hand stiffen in response.

“Last chance to say no,” Hannibal warned.

But before Will could respond that he didn't need one, a boat engine roared to life in the water. “What was that?” Will said scrambling to his feet after bumping into Hannibal's forehead.

Hannibal didn't follow as he was busy nursing the new bump on this head. “Other than poor timing? I’d say we just missed our litterbug.”

# All's Well That Ends?

Chapter Summary

> The crew makes a surprising discovery the next morning, but not everybody is celebrating.

Chapter Notes

> Beta'ed by the hella awesome @Wolftrapqueen who deserves extra kudos this month for holding my hand through a moment of anxiety. <3

They turned on the floodlights and searched the water or some sign of a small craft or its cargo, but whatever got dumped overboard had already been swept out to sea.

“Brody’s going to kill us.”

“And you said it wouldn’t come to murder,” Hannibal said bemused.

“That is not funny,” Will groaned as he paced on deck. “I hope she kills us quickly before we have to explain WHY we missed our man.”

Hannibal leaned against a railing looking loose and unconcerned in a way that made Will green with envy. “If you are nervous about telling her about ***us*** , then don't tell her. Is there any reason Brody needs to know that we saw anything at all?”

“We ***didn’t*** see anything.”

Hannibal held out his hands, empty palms pointing skyward. “Even better! The most convincing deceptions require a grain of truth.”

*'Spoken like a civilian,'* he thought and rolled his eyes. “That’s obstruction.”

“Is it?”

"It is." The question bugged him. Hannibal knew it was obstruction! Doctors toed the line between doctor/patient confidentiality and obstruction all the time, Hannibal more than most because of his consulting work for the FBI. These were not the words of a professional, they were the words friend...or...*something more*, trying to protect Will’s feelings. And this after nothing more than an *almost* kiss. Will hadn't given much thought to how it would be being

with Hannibal, and the early evidence was alarming. This was exactly why anything more than their late-night snuggle was completely out of the question!

“Look, all anyone knows of this individual is that they are guilty of littering; a misdemeanor. It is omission at best.”

“Your argument gets less and less convincing.”

Hannibal pushed off the railing and placed himself squarely in the path of Will’s pacing. “Brody’s theories are based on nothing but her gut instincts and a lack of garbage on the beach. Why are you trusting her? Listen to YOUR instincts, Will, and if you won’t, then trust the evidence, of which there is none.

“What if you’re wrong, and there is something larger going on?”

Hannibal shrugged. “The choice is yours. I will tell whatever story you wish me to tell, but don’t you think we should worry about one monster at a time? Your maneater is still out there, and she could be hungry. We gave her quite the chase yesterday.”

“I doubt she’s in any condition to pluck a snack from the beach.”

“Do you dare risk it? *What if you’re wrong?* ” Hannibal said flinging Will’s own words back at him, and the smile he wore was not warm.

In the end, Hannibal succeeded in convincing Will that their confession could wait until morning as it was unlikely that the perpetrator would return to the same spot. Theoretically Brody should have been in a better mood to receive the bad news with a full night of sleep under her belt. They had not woken her to take her turn at watch since it was the least they could do by way of apology. *Could have. Should have. Would have.* Like most of Will’s theories lately, this one failed spectacularly when tested in the field.

“What do you mean you didn’t see ANYTHING?! What were you TWO doing up here all night?”

Will blushed. What could he say? That he had abandoned the stakeout because of a crisis of self?

“We had a breakthrough on the Ripper case last night and grew distracted. You have our sincerest apologies, Chief Brody,” Hannibal supplied with obnoxious self-control.

Brody glared at Will. “It better have been some breakthrough.”

“Oh, it was,” Hannibal cut in practically purring, and Will wanted to dump the chum bucket over his head. See, this? This was the reason they weren't going to work out. He KNEW Hannibal wouldn’t be able to stop himself. Give him an inch and he took a mile. Restraint was not in that man’s nature. Brody might not know him well enough to pick up on all the little queues, but there was no way they could keep their feelings a secret from the FBI if this kept up. Jack would sniff it out in an instant, and Bev...oh God, he didn’t want to think about what Bev would say. Or Brian. Or Jimmy. Or...Alana. Alana would be the worst.

Will scanned the ocean hoping to catch sight of a shark hungry enough to swallow him whole. That would solve all of his problems, but no dorsal fins poked up above the waterline. The ocean remained as flat as a parking lot. Goddamn. “How about we worry about one nightmare at a time. We still have a shark to kill,” he said parroting back Hannibal’s words before he knew what he was doing. But the point calmed Brody down and allowed the team to call a temporary truce in service of their primary goal.

They set their course for the shark’s pupping grounds. Will was not surprised to see the barrels waiting for them, but what did surprise him was their inertness. He’d come expecting a fight given what the shark had already put them through yesterday, but the barrels bobbed on the surface of the waves, drifting lazily towards the shore in the direction of the tide.

“Slow ahead,” he shouted at Hannibal.

The *Jonah* throttled down and circled the barrels cautiously before coasting to a stop.

“What is she playing at? Did she break free again?” Hannibal said, emerging from the wheelhouse.

“I don’t know? Bring me a hook,” Will ordered.

With hook in hand Will fished the ropes out of the water and tied off on the cleats bolted to the transom of the boat. He’d expected the shark to pull the same trick as before, but there were no sneak attacks this time around. Everything was going fine. Routine, even. It was eerie and entirely too still, like the calm before a storm...or a shark.

“Hand me a mask, will you?” he asked Hannibal.

“No! You are not going for another swim with the shark! This time, I forbid it under my hippocratic oath as your doctor.”

Will snorted. If Hannibal thought last night gave him any right at all to order him around on the job, he was in for the rudest of awakenings. “You can’t stop me. My boat, my rules. There is something down there I’ve got to see. If you won't help me, then I'll get the gear myself.”

Hannibal tried to grab him by the arm, but Will shrugged off his touch. “Back-off!”

Will took only a mask and some flippers with him and jumped into the water without the full wetsuit or oxygen tank. He suspected he wouldn't be out there long. What he hoped to find would not be far below the surface.

Will swam down using the rope that was attached to one of the barrels to guide him down. Twelve feet below the surface he found her, their maneater, but she was already dead.

The corpse hung from the ropes like an ornament, head pointing down and nearly vertical. The body was shockingly intact with only a few nibbles taken from the tail and fins as if the ocean’s other predators were paying their respects by not defiling the body.

He swam closer and laid a hand on her side. She did not move.

This was what was supposed to happen. This had been the plan all along. Stick the shark full of irons, tire her out until she suffocated, but Will had expected to be there when it happened. Instead, she had died last night, alone and in darkness. She deserved a better ending. They both did.

Will's lungs began to ache, but he wasn't ready to leave. He punched the body in frustration, right across the gills, but nothing happened. With one final look into her black lifeless eyes he swam for the surface.

Hannibal was fretting on deck while Brody stood watch with a harpoon gun braced against her shoulder. As soon as Will had his hands on the ladder, Hannibal reached down, gripped him by both forearms, and dragged him onboard. "Well? What did you see down there?"

Will ripped the mask off his face and stared at it. He felt cold and knew he shouldn't. The sun was up and there was not a cloud in the sky to menace it.

"Will? What did you see?" Hannibal asked again.

The storm broke, and with a snarl Will threw the scuba mask across the deck. "A dead shark. Okay?!"

The crew was silent.

"Our shark?" Brody finally asked.

"Of course!" Will snapped at her, which earned him a sharp and disapproving stare from Hannibal. Well fuck him too! Hannibal didn't even like Brody. Why should he be upset if Will was being rude to her?

Brody lowered her gun and gazed at the barrels. "Wow, that's….a rather anticlimactic ending. Don't you think?"

"We're not on a film set here. Not all endings are high-octane, Chief. Life isn't required to follow predictable formulas," he replied and if they did, Will would be demanding a rewrite.

"Hey, I'm not complaining," she said. "Let's head in. I'll radio the coast guard,"

"I guess we better," Will tsked. At least it was over, and he could finally go home to his dogs. "Hannibal, help me cut the lines."

Hannibal drew his fishing knife, but didn't even make it as far as the gunwale before Brody stopped him.

"Wait! Will, what are you thinking?! We've got to bring the shark in."

Will blinked, unsure that he had heard Brody correctly. Bring the shark in? Like she was some sort of perp? "What for? That's not necessary. She's dead."

"The town has to see it. It's the only way to quell the panic."

It made sense from a procedural standpoint, but it still didn't seem *right* to Will. Their adversary deserved better than this barbaric and undignified end. He drew his knife, and turned his back on Brody.

“Will,” Brody warned, “as Sheriff, I must insist. Stand down!”

Before Will could ignore the order, a large rough hand wrapped itself around the wrist that held the knife. “Come away, Will. Let me make you a cup of coffee. Brody can take care of the rest.”

“Hannibal...let me go,” he pleaded.

Hannibal stood behind Will and gently pressed the back of his other hand to Will’s cheek. “You’re burning up,” he whispered into Will’s ear. “Please, Will, come with me. It’s the fever. Don’t let it make you do something you will regret later.

Will resisted but Hannibal’s grip was rock solid.

“Give me the knife,” Hannibal said still whispering. “I promise you, there will be another time to use it.” He had his fingers in Will’s hair again and was gently massaging the back of his skull trying to take away the tension as he had done yesterday. Hannibal didn’t realize he was only awakening an urge to bite.

Brody was staring at Will, shock painted all over her face as he let himself be taken down below. *“For the record, I don’t think you’re a psychopath,”* she had told him once. Hah! Whoops. *‘Fooled ya, I guess.’*

When they reached the main cabin, Will ripped himself out of Hannibal’s hands as soon as his grip slackened. “This is wrong!” Will said and began pacing the room. He was brimming with kinetic energy. He needed release from the disappointment that was ripping open his rib cage. He wanted to kick. He wanted to scream. Shoot. Fight. Bite. Anything!

“I find it distasteful too, but you seem disproportionately angry about it. Sit down and let me help you, Will.

“No! You’re not getting it, Hannibal! It’s ALL wrong! Everything...I'm--oh, God, I feel sick.” Will wobbled and ran to the galley sink lest he vomit.

“Calm down, Will. What is wrong? Help me understand”

“How it’s ending! It was supposed to be different. I was supposed to feel different when it was over!” Will blinked. There were tears gathering in the corners of his eyes.

Hannibal took a seat at the dining table and relaxed into therapist mode, one leg crossed over the other. “Why don’t you have a seat?” He said and gestured at the chair beside him.

Will wiped his eyes, and took a deep breath. He stayed where he was, gripping the counter with white knuckles, but the familiar structure of therapy and the doctor-patient dynamic Hannibal was reestablishing was slowly giving him back some control. “I think it’s better if I stand,” he swallowed.

Hannibal folded his hands in his lap and regarded Will with the serenity of a Catholic saint. No matter what he thought about this episode, he let no judgement show. It was the thing Will liked best about Hannibal.

“You feel cheated. Did you want to kill the shark?”

“It’s what we came here to do,” Will answered dispassionately.

“That is not what I asked you. Did you want to kill the shark? Did you want to feel like you felt when you killed Garret Jacob Hobbs? Or when you killed Dennis?”

Dennis’s name pulled Will firmly back into his rational self. “I didn’t kill Dennis. My father did. I didn’t. I’m not like that,” Will said shaking his head and ignoring the part about Hobbs. The anger that had taken him so powerfully earlier was receding like the tide, leaving shame, confusion, and fear in its wake.

“What aren’t you like, Will?

The world spun and grew black around the edges. “I’m not a killer. I'm not.” He wasn't sure if he’d spoken the last part aloud before the darkness enveloped him fully. When Will opened his eyes again, he stood in a river—ankle deep in mud that smelled of brimstone. He wasn’t alone either. The forms of Hobbs and Dennis moved into his periphery on the shore of the River Styx. They walked towards each other, smiled, and shook hands. The moment they touched, Will felt himself sink further into the mud. Where was Hannibal? Where was his ballast? “You promised to stop me!” Will shouted.

Then he felt an arm fall across his chest, and the warmth of Hannibal’s broad body against his back. “No, Will. I promised to go ***with*** you. We’ll rise or sink together.”

# Iron In The Blood

Chapter Summary

> The circus is in town, and tonight's main attraction is the bloated corpse of Will's once great adversary. Meanwhile, Will and Hannibal share a quiet moment at the Avalon Inn and ponder the absurdities of the world including chicken and waffles.

Chapter Notes

> Beta'ed by the ever stupendous @Wolftrapqueen27!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke thrashing and gasping for air as he shook himself free from the remains of a dream where he'd been cutting up the bodies of HIS victims, the men and women he'd caught while working for the FBI. Body parts and blood went into the chum bucket to be fed to the sharks. He had hummed while he worked, and Hannibal who was not Hannibal had been there too, wrapped around Will's feet. The merman would trill to get his attention when he was hungry, and Will would feed him by hand the choicest bits from the worst offenders. Unlike previous dreams, there was no internal debate and no thought behind the process at all, only the the steady wet hiss of his knife sliding beneath skin.

In the real world, Hannibal the Human sat in a chair beside Will's bed with a glass of water and some ibuprofen in his hands. "Drink," he ordered when Will had settled. "You are still running a fever."

Will swallowed the pills and drank the water. A second glass was already waiting for him on the nightstand. He sipped at this one more slowly. His initial panic had faded into numbness while he hydrated. "Where are we?"

"Back at port where the celebration is in full swing."

Will could hear it from the cabin. The occasional loud "whoop" or gunshot interrupted the low hum of excited conversation. Boards creaked. Children either screamed in terror or squealed with laughter no doubt gawking at the killer shark. It must be a real circus out there. The dock would be packed to capacity. Will could feel himself growing angry again. "I've got to get away from this."

"We'll have to cut through it first. Would you like to change before we go?" Hannibal smirked at Will's nightclothes.

Will stared at his glass, which he clutched like it was the only thing holding him together. These were not the clothes Will had fainted in. Those would still be wet and resting in a hamper by now. Great. Add *'has already seen me naked'* to the list of boundaries Hannibal had inappropriately crossed **in one morning.** "Are you sure that's the question you want to ask?"

"This hardly seems like the time to ask about the rest. You hit your head when you fainted, Will, and are still warmer than I'd like to see. I'm more worried about that."

"More worried about a bump on my head than what's really wrong with me? And yeah, okay, you win. There IS something wrong with me." Will sighed and finished his water putting off what he didn't want to say. "I'm crazy, aren't I? It's not stress. It's not a tumor. I let too much in and lost myself along the way. I'm unfit to do this job." His voice broke as he said it. "I'm becoming a garden-variety psychopath, Hannibal. Or maybe Freddie Lounds was right about me from the start." Will was upset, but he was shocked that he wasn't crying. There was pain but also relief in the confession. He was not expecting that so he kept on talking and chased that feeling like a hungry wolf. "I'm afraid of myself, but not entirely, and that's the worst part. When I dream, I feel like I'm finally becoming who I need to be to solve this case. But when I'm awake, I don't recognize who I am anymore."

Hannibal took the water glass from him and then moved to sit beside Will on the bed. "Nothing about you is garden-variety and neither Jack nor myself have ever found you to be insufficient for the job. You've solved twice as many cases for the Bureau as they could have hoped to solve on their own."

"But how much longer can I be effective? I'm shattering in slow motion, Hannibal."

Hannibal picked up one of his hands and squeezed it "Longer if you agree to start listening to me completely. Jack needn't know the particulars, but there are things we can try in therapy to help you compartmentalize and accept the horrors, which you ingest daily. Do you trust me, Will?"

"As my psychiatrist? Or as my friend?"

Hannibal tucked a curl behind Will's ear then ran his fingers along his jawline. "As someone who cares about your well being. One does not preclude the other."

"Most therapists don't want to kiss their patients." Will said and pivoted toward Hannibal.

"Then it is a good thing you are not officially my patient isn't it?" Hannibal leaned forward and kissed the top of Will's forehead. "You're still too warm. Maybe we should stay in."

"No." Will could only imagine what Hannibal had planned if they stayed below deck. "You said you would stop if I told you to. I'm telling you to stop."

Hannibal's shoulders slumped in disappointment. He started to push back, but Will grabbed him by the shoulder with his free hand.

“It’s not because I don’t want to. I’m not well. If you kiss me now, I won’t feel it. Not in the way you want me to. I’m….cold,” Will said unsure if Hannibal understood his meaning. A perennial victim of his own low self-esteem, Will wasn’t sure what Hannibal saw in him, but he was positive it wasn’t that side of him that had shown up to the party uninvited. He wanted to feel like a man when Hannibal kissed him again and not this dark thing born in blood and violence.

Hannibal smiled with his eyes. “Whatever you say, Will. I’ll be waiting.”

…

Will felt nervous stepping off the boat onto the dock. He was certain the dock would collapse under the weight of those assembled to gawk at the monster shark. The townsfolk cheered and clapped him and Hannibal on the back as they pushed their way through the crowd looking for Brody. They found her beneath a crane from which hung the shark.

Blood ran down the maneater’s body from the holes where the irons had punctured her sides. Her black eyes had turned grey with the film of death hooding them. Will felt ill as he watched children run up to the body and stick their heads in the shark's gaping mouth while their parents took photos. “Maybe I’m not the only one who's lost their mind,” Will grumbled upset by the fanfare. He could understand why the people were happy, but he couldn’t join them. Their nightmare was over. The curse was lifted. The beaches would reopen, and normal life would resume. But five people had still died, and no one seemed concerned about the little clusters of men and women in black mourning attire must be feeling right now.

Brody saw him and Hannibal in the crowd and tried to motion them towards center stage, but Will shook his head. He couldn’t go up there any more than he could have accepted a commendation for shooting Garret Jacob Hobbs. “Let’s get out of here. This is grotesque.”

They were almost to the end of the dock, almost home free, when they were stopped by an old “friend.”

“Well, moptop,” Quint said perched on top of a piling with a cigarette hanging from his lips. “I gotta admit, you did good, brother, real good. I guess you’ve got a little iron in the blood after all. Pity you didn’t get ‘er done sooner though.”

“What are you talking about, Quint?” Will sighed in no mood to do this right now with the old sea dog.

“Didn’t ya hear? Another boy’s gone missing. Boy Scout no less. Disappeared yesterday. Shame you weren’t a little quicker with the knife. Of course the body hasn’t washed up on shore yet so maybe he’s still alive. Hah! Or maybe your shark swallowed him whole. He was a tiny little thing after all. Kinda annoying too. I ain’t sad he’s gone. Him and his friend liked to throw eggs at my boat.”

Of course! What was one more kick to the teeth at the end of it all. Another victim. A child! Will thought he might vomit. His anger at having been being deprived of the kill seemed like a trivial thing now. Another child. Fuck!

“But hey, you got yer guy, right? It’s all over, ain’t it? You two lovebirds can go home now. Hope you got some pictures to take back with you. That’s some fish story to tell the boys up in Washington. Ain't never seen a shark that large before in these waters. He’s a big boy.”

“I thought that shark was female,” Hannibal said.

“Hah! Didn’t you see them clampers along its belly? That’s a male shark. Damn, city mice.” Quint hopped off the the piling and put out his cigarette with the heel of his shoe. “Anyway, what’s it matter? The beastie is dead now, and I suppose you’ll be heading back to Washington. About time too, I’ve grown sick of looking at ya. See ya never, neighbors.”

“Quint! Just the man I’ve been looking for.” The voice belonged to Brody who came striding around the corner with her cuffs on her belt. “I was hoping you would take a ride with me over to the station.”

“Can't say I've got the time, Chiefy.”

“And I can't say that you’ve got the choice,” Brody said drawing her cuffs. “Quint, I’m arresting you for the attempted murder of Special Agent Will Graham. You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to an attorney--,”

“What did you do?!” Quint bellowed at Will and Hannibal as Brody cuffed him. His eyes were white and wild with shock. “What did you two assholes do?!”

“We could ask you the same thing,” Will said.

“When I get out, we’re gonna have words, moptop!”

“That sounds like a threat, Quint. I’ll be sure to note it in my report.” Brody said.

“Shows what you know! Shows what any of y’all know!“ he snarled before he began to laugh. “Whatever. I’ll be out by morning, and then….Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish Ladies. Farewell and adieu, you ladies of Spain. For we’ve received orders for to sail for old England, and we may ne'er see you fair ladies again.” The melody had a hollow anger as deep as Will’s frustration, which only grew the longer they stayed in the vicinity of the marina.

Will and Hannibal left Quint in Brody’s hands and fled the scene as fast as they could. Cops had been set at the stairway onto the docks preventing any more people from entering. Will and Hannibal had to shove their way through the crowd just to escape.

“Hey did you bring the ibuprofen with you? This headache won’t give up,” Will asked when they reached Main Street, which was plumb empty.

“You’ve had enough for now, but perhaps lunch would help?”

“Lead the way, *yer highness*,” Will said with a grandiose bow.

...

The went to the Avalon Inn and Hannibal requested a bottle of whatever was the most expensive. Will wished he had been in a better place mentally to enjoy the expression on Hannibal's face when a bottle of Sutter Home arrived with a round of water.

"I cannot wait to go home," Hannibal moaned and sniffed at the wine with renewed displeasure.

"What's the first thing you're going to do when you get back to civilization?" Will asked trying to rally out of his black mood. They should be celebrating. The battle was won.

"A hot bath. Followed by a large meal cooked in my own kitchen and then a second hot bath. I feel like I haven't been properly clean in over a month," he said scratching at his forearms.

"It's almost been a month. Did you ever think we would survive each other for that long?"

Hannibal tapped his finger on the hilt of a steak knife. "I never had any doubts. You are my friend, Will. I don't take people into my life lightly."

"Liar," Will said drinking half his glass in one gulp. "You fidget when you are deciding between two contradictory things. Admit it, there were a few times you were ready to kill me.

Hannibal smiled. "Alright, there may have been a *few* times."

Their waitress arrived to take their order. "What can I get you boys?" she chirped in a thick drawl.

"A burger and fries," Will said.

"And how 'bout you, honey?"

Hannibal skimmed the laminated menu with open disdain. Not finding anything to his immediate liking, he set the menu down and sniffed the air, scenting the room like a bloodhound. "There. What are they having?" he asked pointing at the table on the far side of the room.

"The chicken and waffles?" she supplied.

His eyes widened in disbelief. "Chicken...and...waffles?"

Mistaking Hannibal's sticker shock for an actual order, their waitress bounced away. It was too much for Will to stand. He slapped his hand on the table and laughed uncontrollably, drawing annoyed stares from all the other patrons and from Hannibal.

"Pardon me, I need to speak with the chef," Hannibal said primly and hurried off to the kitchen.

Will felt a bit better, but the malaise threatened to overtake him again now that he was alone. He turned his mind outward and focused his thoughts on his environment rather than his feelings. There was a baseball game on television. The Soxs were winning. The light over

Table Four needed replacing. Table Seven was out of ketchup. Everyone was happy. Everyone but him, and oh yeah, the shark was still dead.

The hair on the nape of his neck prickled. Will searched for the cause until his eyes fell on a child. The boy was only about six with curly hair and green eyes. He was the youngest of a family of five, but that wasn't what was odd about him. What was odd about him was the way he sat with one hand curled around his glass and the other resting on his butter knife. It was only odd because that's how Will was now sitting.

Will picked up his own glass and drank from it. The child drank his juice in response. Will switched his knife and fork around, and the child mimicked him. *'He's mirroring me,'* Will realized and remembered that he used to do the same thing as a kid. *'Oh buddy, I hope you turn out better than I did.'* Will smiled and so did the boy. They stuck their tongues out at each other and laughed. It was helping, and then Will remembered the Boy Scout who was still missing.

Hannibal returned ten minutes later.

“Are you feeling any better?”

Will threw back his wine like it was whiskey. “Does that answer your question?” He poured his next glass to the brim.

Miss Manners raised his eyebrows but wisely kept his opinions to himself about the heavy pour.

“To arriving too late,” Will said and raised his glass. Red wine sloshed over the brim, staining the white tablecloth like arterial spray.

“To finishing a job,” Hannibal corrected and clinked his glass against Will’s lightly. “Are we finished here, Will? Or have you decided to stay and help Brody?”

“I don’t know? I feel like I ought to, but we have no jurisdiction here. Procedurally, it’s the wrong thing to do. I might mess up the case for Brody, but it *feels* like the right thing to do.”

“Why? Why is it the right thing? What do you owe this town? Do you feel guilty that you couldn’t save the boy? That’s it, isn’t it? We don’t even know that it was the shark that took him, Will.”

“It was the shark. It’s always the shark!”

“We’ll know soon enough, won’t we? What’s left of the body will wash up in a day or two.”

The large family had finished their meal and were rising to leave. Will’s new friend tried to wave at him as they departed, but he was whisked away by his mother before the farewell could be returned. The shark could have taken that little boy as easily as the others, and now the shark would never take another life again. That’s what mattered, Will reminded himself. He didn't need to witness the shark’s death to celebrate life. He didn't need to wield the knife to feel good. He HAD to remember that.

“We could know a lot sooner than that. Half of him is probably sitting in shark’s belly right.” Will said offhandedly, but perked up immediately. Of course! How could he be so dense?! They could find out right now!

Hannibal groaned. “You have that look. What is it?”

“Let’s check it out! We may have been too late to save the boy, but we could at least give the family an answer today! Know anyone who might be willing to help us with an autopsy?”

Hannibal twitched looking suddenly nervous. “Um, I might know one person.”

Will smirked. This was beautiful. “Call her. I don't mind.” Beneath the table he put his hand on Hannibal’s thigh. After last night and this morning, Will knew he wouldn't have to worry about Michelle Hendrix anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Cause I couldn't NOT have that scene from the film where Brody and his son share that quiet moment. ;-) (Also, for the record: I love chicken and waffles. Hannibal can get over himself.)

# Farewell and Adieu

Chapter Summary

Shit get's real, really quickly. (And that's all I'm gonna say about that.)

Chapter Notes

OMG! THE PENULTIMATE CHAPTER! I can scarcely believe it. Beta'ed by the always amazing @Wolftrapqueen27! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sun was down before the three of them could get access to the shark. It had taken that long to sate the curiosity of the residents and clear the area. Will texted with Brody in the meantime to find out how her interrogation went. Quint had been predictably uncooperative, suspiciously nervous, and in the biggest surprise yet, been bailed out by Mayor Vaughn.

*Vaughn? How's he involved?*

**Brody:** He says he paid Quint to catch the shark when you two came up empty. Ten thousand. All in advance.

Made sense. Will thought back to the business deal he saw Vaughn and Quit shaking hands over not that long ago.

*Be careful. I've got a bad feeling about all of this.*

**Brody:** You too! Quint's loose and gunning for you. Said he's going to "knock your curly-headed block off" TO MY FACE. After I interrogated him for attempted murder! Idiot. I almost threw him back in his cell for that, but Vaughn was already there and being a real bear.

*Thanks for the warning.*

**Brody:** Hey....

**Brody:** 1 more thing

Will sighed. He had been waiting for this text ever since his most recent "episode." He remembered how Brody had looked at him after it happened, remembered it with painful clarity, and hated that he felt more angry than embarrassed by the pity she had shown him than anything else. Fear would have been something he could understand and empathize

with. Hell, he was terrified of himself most days. But pity, it was a shoe that didn't fit and rubbed him raw where there was no room for his skin to breath.

**Brody:** You okay?

*Yeah. Sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you.*

**Brody:** Don't worry about it! The Doc filled me in. You just rest up and let that hunk of a man take care of you!

Brody punctuated that last statement with three winking emojis causing Will to wince. It was like staring at the Ghost of Future Beverly. Was it really that obvious? He started typing up a denial, then deleted. A minute eclipsed before Brody began typing again.

**Brody:** Will, a lot of folks have...stuff going on inside. I served with many of them. I can't promise you that it'll get better, but I believe in you. Call me anytime you need to talk.

Will needed both hands to punch in a simple "thank you" because his hands were shaking so badly. He knew Brody meant well and appreciated the concern, but they were soldiers fighting two different wars. Hannibal was the only person he'd ever been able to talk to about this "stuff." He was the only one who understood.

Will tucked his phone into his back pocket when he heard a car pull up to the top of the stairs, which lead down to the docks. He hoped that would be Michelle because he was eager to get this over with.

The shark hung by its tail, mouth gaping, as it rotted from the end of a chain. Will felt his former anger rising as he looked on at the diminished form of his adversary. *'If it's me that brings the Ripper in, I'm not going to let this happen. I'm just going to shoot him,'* he thought and shuddered. That wasn't a thought that belonged to a cop. It belonged to that monster that had taken up residence inside of him and kept stubbornly pushing its way to the foreground.

Will looked for Hannibal, for his center of balance, and found him helping Michelle down the stairs with her equipment. A feeling that he now recognized as jealousy tugged at him, but his anxiety was quickly soothed by opening his eyes to the wider pitcher. Michelle smiled and flipped her hair like a Baywatch caricature clearly coming onto Hannibal, but Hannibal's body language was closed off and guarded. After setting down the bags he carried, Hannibal slipped his hands into his pockets and stood at an obvious distance. A confused expression flickered across Michelle's face. "Where's my kiss?" she said cloyingly and moved in to kiss *him*. Hannibal deftly presented his cheek instead, and took her by the hand. "Forgive my rudeness, Michelle," he said planting two audible kisses across her knuckles. The sound of his lips smacking against her skin made Will's skin feel clammy.

*'Leave it alone,'* he told himself and turned his back on the pair. Will fired up the electric crane lowered the shark onto a plastic tarp. While he worked, he could hear Hannibal and Michelle chittering in the background in ways that both pleased and aggravated him. "Are you okay, Hannibal?" she asked repeatedly, oftentimes with an accompanying "why didn't you call me?" tacked on to the end. Hannibal navigated the situation as well as expected. He

gave plausible excuses, and rebuffed her without offering offense as they still needed her equipment for the autopsy.

“So I know why I am here, but why are ***you*** here? Why are you here **really?**” she asked directing the question squarely at Hannibal. “You told me you needed my equipment. Fine, but I wasn't expecting that you needed to use it on the shark.”

“We’re confirming the cause of death of the latest victim” Will responded.

“Hannibal?” Michelle said intentionally ignoring Will.

Hannibal looked between Will and Michelle wearing a slight frown. Good! It was about time he took a turn in the mousetrap. “It is as Will says.”

“But why? We know the shark killed that boy. I’ve already filled out the autopsy report. I'm just waiting for the body parts to wash up on shore before I file.”

Will didn't bother responding this time and shot Hannibal his best *“you deal with this”*look. Jack would have been so proud.

“It seemed the most expedient way to provide comfort to his family,” Hannibal replied.

Will completed his prep work and rifled through Michelle’s equipment until he found a saw large enough to disembowel the beast. “**Doctor** Lecter, **Doctor** Hendrix, would either of you like to do the honors of attending to the patient?”

Hannibal glanced down at the tops of his boat shoes and pursed his lips while Michelle took a sudden interest in her nails. Neither one answered, which was answer enough.

“Fine. I’ll do it myself,” Will groaned. Prima donnas. They really were so much alike.

“Let us know if we can advise you in your investigation, *Agent*Graham,” Hannibal quipped.

Will knelt at the side of the beast and slipped the large serrated blade into the shark’s abdomen. The smell was horrible and the work rough. This was nothing like cutting open a little dusky shark for bait. As the cut widened, guts began to spill out onto the tarp. Will dove into the belly of the beast and scooped out the alien anatomy of the Great White onto the tarp.

“I thought you would have leapt at this chance, Doctor Lecter, for much as you complain about how much you miss surgery,” Will griped.

“Please, don't even jest. My surgery was a sterile environment, nothing like this butchery.”

“And I get enough of this on my day job!” Michelle added unprompted.

With a hidden smile, Will tossed some organ meat over his shoulder and relished the collective squeak from Michannibal as they tried to dodge it.

“WILL!” Hannibal shouted back, which meant he had at least gotten one of them.

“Sorry,” he mumbled intentionally too quiet to be clearly heard. His hands closed around what he assumed was the large distended stomach of the shark, already a bad sign. He wiped his hands on his shorts and fished for his pocket knife.

Meanwhile Michannibal talked about plans they had apparently made pre-shark cage.

“Are we still on for our picnic this weekend or will you be leaving now that the shark has been caught? The North End is lovely this time of year. I would dearly like to show you the beaches before you leave us.”

“I don't think so Michelle. I will be returning to Washington *with*Agent Graham.”

Will glanced over his shoulder and glared at Hannibal. ‘*Returning WITH Agent Graham? Are you kidding me!?’* There was no doubt about what Hannibal meant with that inflection. Christ, they were so fucked. Will was never going to hear the end of this from the forensics team when they figured out what was happening between him and Hannibal.

“I see,” Michelle said acknowledging Will’s presence for the first time with a glare of her own. “So I take it you two kissed and made-up then? Congratulations.”

Will’s head snapped back around to hide his red cheeks. He had wondered how much Hannibal had told her that night. Answer: everything. Great. Fucking great.

His hands shook as he cut into the shark’s stomach, and he gagged at the stench that rose from it. Inside the shark’s stomach, Will found a license plate, a bicycle tire, half a dolphin, and some smaller fish. But missing in all that garbage was one import thing.

“He’s not here,” Will said too distracted by the feeling of relief to consider anything else. “The shark didn't kill him. The child could still be alive!”

“Will…,” Hannibal whispered, “run.”

Will turned around to see Hannibal fall onto all fours. He tried once to rise then collapsed onto the ground unconscious. Michelle stood over him grinning; she held an auto-injector in her hand, which no doubt contained a tranquilizer or worse. “You just couldn't leave dead sharks lying, could you? Way to ruin **everything**, Will,” then she kicked Hannibal in his side.

Will scrambled to his feet with his knife in hand, but there was too much viscera on the ground. It made the tarp slick. He fell, and Michelle lunged. Will felt a sharp pain in his leg, and within moments, he was out cold.

…

Will didn't expect to wake up on board the *Jonah*, but here he was, hands cuffed behind his back. He felt like he had been run over by a tractor, maybe even two tractors.

“Will, are you okay?”

“Did you get the license plate?” he groaned.

“Excuse me?”

“Did you get the license plate of the truck that hit us?”

“Why, yes, I did. The plate read H-E-N-D-R-I-X. Happy?”

It was probably the fault of the tranquilizers, but Will couldn't help but find Hannibal’s attitude and this whole situation comical. “What? Are you two no longer on a first-name basis? Jesus Christ, Hannibal. You sure can pick ‘em. Your girlfriend is a fucking serial killer.”

Hannibal blinked and then blushed. “It’s been her all along?”

“Yeah, she's been disguising her kills as shark attacks, probably chumming the waters at night and giving the bodies to the sharks.”

“You’re sure about that?”

Will was damn sure, now. It’s exactly what he had done in his dreams to the bodies of Garret Jacob Hobbs, Dennis O’Callahan, and the rest of his victims. And then there was the failed reconstruction in the morgue where he had envisioned himself as a man and not a shark. Argh! He had been so fucking blind! “A shark is only a fish, Hannibal. Its kills aren't premeditated. There's no motive, no patterns, and nothing for me to analyze. That’s exactly what I told Jack before I accepted this fool’s errand.” But there was a pattern. There was a pattern and he had missed it. “Where were you and Michelle going to go on your date this weekend?”

“For a hike along the beaches near her home...in the North End. My God…”

Will nodded. “Brody said someone was dumping into the bay and assumed it was related to the recent opioid crisis, but it was Michelle. That's why nothing else was washing up onto the beach except victims because it was their bodies that were being dumped overboard by the “Litterbug.”

“What else could Brody think when the coroner's autopsy reports so unilaterally attributed the cause of deaths to shark attacks?”

“Exactly.”

“Will, as much as the forensics team would love this case, how do we get out of this so it is not OUR autopsy reports they are investigating?”

“Working on it.” Will sat up and the world spun around him on a dizzying lopsided axis. “We’re stopped. Have we been stopped long?”

“Long enough to attract a few sharks if she is chumming the waters like I suspect.” he said.

“I don't have my gun, and she took my knife so I can't cut you free.”

“I have mine,” Hannibal smiled. “Michelle must not think I am the type to carry one. But someone once told me a good sailor never goes anywhere without his knife.”

“How mad would you be if I said I could kiss you right now?” Will grinned.

“Don’t even jest. As usual, Will, your timing could not be worse. Now come, I need help getting the knife out of my back pocket.”

“Okay, on your knees.”

Hannibal chuckled. “My, how forward.”

“Hannibal…,” Will warned.

“If you can't look death in the eye and laugh, what is the point of living?” he chortled.

Will tucked his knees up to his chest so he could step through his restraints and bring his hands to the front. Then he and Hannibal shifted awkwardly into position so he could fish the knife out of Hannibal’s pocket. But as soon as Will had it in his hands, he heard footsteps on the stairs. “Free yourself and get to my spare side arm while we’re gone. It’s in my bag,” he whispered into Hannibal’s ear and pressed the knife into his hand.

“Where will you be?”

“Getting myself fed to the sharks,” he said wobbling to his feet. By standing, he hoped to make himself the bigger target, the one Michelle should logically get rid of first since he represented the larger threat.

“I really wish you would stop doing that. I’m not jumping in after you, Will, I swear I am not.”

“Shhh,” Will ordered as Michelle came around the corner with Will’s gun in her hand.

“Good morning, boys. I hope you slept well, I can't imagine you’ll be quite as comfortable sleeping with the fishes tonight.”

Hannibal, damn him, smiled at that one. Add “enjoys terrible puns” to the ever-growing list of things he and Michelle shared. They probably could have been quite happy together. Shame she was a psychopath. *‘Or maybe Hannibal just has a type?’* Will mused, thinking about himself.

“That's good. Did you think of that yourself or did you poach it out of a dollar store joke book?” Will sassed back, using that commonality she shared with Hannibal to his advantage. Will knew from experience that nothing angered Hannibal more than having his tastes attacked by being called cheap. Judging from the look of contempt she fired back, he had succeeded.

“You’re in awfully good spirits for a man who's about to be eaten alive.”

Will shrugged. “Comes with the job description. Besides, if you can’t laugh in the face of death, what’s the point of living?” If they didn't make it out alive, Will hoped Hannibal appreciated that final shout out.

Michelle’s finger twitched around the trigger but she held back. “Why don’t ***you*** come with me, Will. I'll spare Hannibal the unpleasantness of watching you die.”

“How kind,” Will said and moved toward her casually.

“Hey!” She shouted moving away from the stairwell and tightening her grip on the gun. “Slowly or I'll shoot.”

Will walked up the stairs and onto the deck. Despite Michelle’s “good morning,” the sun was not fully up. The sky was still mostly medium blue and tinged with red only at the waterline. Fitting. *‘Red sky at morning, sailor take warning.’*

It was hazy and moist that morning, but the fog lay low like a thick blanket over the roiling Atlantic. Off the stern of the boat, Will could see a large black slick trailing behind the boat, which disappeared into the fog thirty feet away. It was an eerie sight. Several black pointed fins cut back and forth through the slick like a pack of hungry wolves. Occasionally a conical snout lifted out of the water and swallowed a large chunk of albacore floating on the water’s surface. At least Will hoped it was albacore, but he couldn't be sure. Michelle was a serial killer like Tobias Budge and Garrett Jacob Hobbs. Those pieces of meat could just as easily be the remains of her victims, perhaps even the little boy who had gone missing.

Fuck.

That last image wound Will back up like a spring-loaded pistol. What he wouldn't give to have that gun in his hands.

Will drew a deep breath, calming himself. She had him at a disadvantage. He had to be careful and calm. He couldn’t let himself get carried away. Hannibal’s life depended on it.

Hannibal.

Will needed to give him more time.

“Stand on the transom of the boat,” she ordered.

Will managed it in an awkward fashion. He was determined not to show her his back since she would undoubtedly shoot him the minute their little duel of wits was concluded.
“Interesting M.O. you have here Michelle. Mind if I ask ‘*why sharks?* ’ before you make me walk the plank?”

“Easy, I didn't want to be caught. When you yell shark, people are upset. But it's terribly logical if you twist their fears in the right direction. Sharks are natural predators after all. They can be studied and understood. They can be dissected and categorized. But if you yell serial killer…well then you’ve got a panic, and troublemakers like you sniffing around where

you aren't wanted. Nothing captures the imagination and nightmares of the public quite like a psychopath because no one understands us. No one but each other. Right, Will?"

Will saw the bait she'd laid out and shied away from it. "It's a little hammy, the shark thing. Like something out of a bad retro thriller. Don't you think?"

Hannibal's face came into view as he crept up the stairwell moving like a wraith. But instead of Will's gun, it was a kitchen knife he held in his hand.

"Well, we can't all be the Chesapeake Ripper," Michelle said.

Will snorted. "No, we certainly cannot."

The top step creaked beneath Hannibal's weight betraying him.

Michelle turned towards him prompting Hannibal to lunge forward with his knife raised in attack. The deck was overcrowded, which probably saved his life, because when Hannibal tripped over the chum bucket, he narrowly avoided getting shot.

Will hopped off the transom and rushed to assist.

Michelle fired two more erratic rounds at each of the men, but it was clear that guns were not her forte, which made sense. Given her M.O., a gun must feel too impersonal. There was an intimacy in her brand of predation that would not be satisfied by a mere range weapon. It was a mistake to introduce a new element into her process, but perhaps because there were two intended victims this time, she'd worried about maintaining control over the men. She shouldn't have tried to fix what wasn't broken.

Will closed the distance, but began to slide across the fiberglass deck, which was now covered in stale blood from the chum bucket.

Michell flipped the gun around and struck Will across the face sending him to the floor. His head struck something hard and metallic, maybe one of the scuba tanks that was rolling around on deck--if he was lucky. If he was unlucky, he'd just cracked his head open on the fucking anchor with all its hard angles.

Michelle suddenly screamed after Hannibal had risen up behind her and plunged the knife into her shoulder. They grappled and Will watched as Hannibal shoved Michelle overboard before he lost consciousness.

…

"Will! Will, wake up! Are you okay? Will!"

Will woke in Hannibal's arms while being lightly slapped across the face.

"Ouch! Hey! Stop! I'm awake! Hannibal!" he groaned as he tried to fend Hannibal off.

"Will, we have a problem."

Will didn't need to ask what the problem was. He could hear Michelle screaming for help in the distance. He tried to stand up on his own but needed Hannibal to pull him to his feet in the end. Between the drugs and the head injury, the world had gone topsy-turvy. Hannibal helped him to the gunwale. They could see Michelle swimming in vain for the boat, but she was caught in the strong current of the North End and being steadily borne out to sea, farther from the boat.

"Oh my God," Will said seeing a dorsal fin pass behind her. She was bleeding when she went into the water, he remembered, bleeding from the wound Hannibal had given her. "Hannibal, turn the boat around."

"I cannot. The keys went overboard with her."

Will tried to climb over the gunwale ready to dive in after her, but Hannibal grabbed him by both arms and pulled him forcibly back into the boat.

"Will! You cannot! There are too many of them! You will be killed!" he shouted and his normally pale skin tinged red with blood and anger.

"We can't just sit here, Hannibal! They'll kill her!"

Hannibal wrapped both of his arms around Will's chest in a tight embrace. "I won't let you throw your life away, Will. I won't. An animal like that is not worth it."

Will thrashed trying to break free, but Hannibal's grip was iron.

Then Michelle screamed, and it was not the same kind of scream as before. This was real terror, laced with pain and hopelessness.

Will settled down knowing it was too late now. Breakfast was served. "My God...they're eating her." He wanted to vomit.

"There is one thing you can still do for her," Hannibal said and spun Will around to face him. He reached behind him and removed Will's spare side arm from the back of his pants.

"No!" Will said and backed away from Hannibal until his heels struck the gunwale of the ship.

Hannibal unlatched the safety and held the gun out to him. "You must! It is a mercy, Will. A mercy!"

*'A mercy,'* those were the words his father had used when he killed Dennis. Now, it was happening all over again...like fate.

"I can't do this," he lied. He knew he could technically make the shot, but he was afraid of what it would mean if he did. Dennis, Garrett...Michelle. She would be victim number three. That seemed significant. Irreversible.

Hannibal pressed the gun into his hand when Will still refused to take it. "You are the only one who can! Listen to her, Will!"

Michelle was screaming for help that would never arrive; he felt that dark part of himself stir in answer. It longed for the relief of the trigger beneath his finger. He could just let the sharks have her, but how was that any better than doing the deed himself?

“A mercy...*to kill her*,” Will repeated and wished his voice sounded less hollow when he said it. The hand that held the gun still lay limply at his side, but Will’s grip was tighter than it was before.

“Yes! A mercy! Do it!”

Hannibal had his hand on Will’s elbow and spun him back around to face the ocean. He slipped one arm around Will’s waist, and squeezed the arm that held the gun with his free hand. “I've got you, Will. I’ve got you. I’ll be your ballast, remember?”

More dorsal fins were closing in on Michelle. It was about to get really ugly in a moment.

“Why are you hesitating? Did she hesitate when she killed Vanessa Shaw, Ben Gardener, or any of the children? She’s a murderer, Will, no different from Garret Jacob Hobbs. You rid the world of him, and we’re all better off for it. This is the best way, Will. Trust me.”

Hannibal was right and he was wrong. Unlike Hobbs, Will could not claim that this was self-defense, but it might be justice. Will closed his eyes, imagined the ticking of a clock, and walked himself backwards in time through the lives of all of Michelle’s victims. He imagined them with their families. He imagined the children at school or playing with their friends on the beach. He attached himself to their humanity even as he prepared to momentarily step outside of his own. He thought about Michelle's sickly sweet smiles and the haughty airs that had always irritated him. When Will opened his eyes again, he was decided and calm. He was ready.

Will raised the gun, and it was not with mercy by which he aimed.

“Smile, you son of a bitch,” he growled as he pulled the trigger.

Chapter End Notes

For the Jaws fans among you, I hope you liked the spin that took on the original ending. ;-) I couldn't end this fic without including a version of Brody's last stand, but whether Will is the hero of the hour or the victim, I'll let you decide.

Tumblr link.

# Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will recover after their ordeal and begin to make plans to return to Baltimore, but one piece of unfinished business lingers between them….

Chapter Notes

OH. MY. GOD. The end is nigh! Can you believe it? A quick note of thanks to everyone who has made it thus far. Your kudos, your comments, and your support have meant the world to me! Please enjoy this final chapter.

Beta'ed by the incredible @wolftrapqueen27 who made this a far better fic than I could have hoped to achieve alone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What an absolutely *humiliating* turn of events, Hannibal chided himself for the hundredth time. Will might be a profiler, but at least he had his illness to absolve him of his near-fatal lack of hindsight. What excuse did he have?

*Nothing.*

He had no excuse.

Except for the distraction of a pair of pretty blue eyes that looked like the sea before a storm. Blue eyes, not green eyes like Michelle's had been before she'd been picked apart by her own design, and what a beautiful image that had made. Shame he had not been able to sit back and enjoy it without pretense.

But soon…soon indeed. The time for pretense was rapidly ending; however, those dangerous blue eyes of Will's needed to remain closed for a little while longer.

They laid in Will's bed after the fight, half-dressed and tangled up in each other's limbs. A gust of damp air blew through the open portcullis and pricked at the skin of Will's bare chest and arms. It clawed at the flecks of drying blood and fish guts, clinging to the hairs of his forearms and raised gooseflesh across his naked torso. Hannibal lay wholly absorbed by the sight while his beloved burrowed deeper into his chest to escape the breeze. He was at peace thinking of Will as such, his beloved—HIS beloved—and beloved Will was, despite how he currently reeked of fish guts and salt tears.

Seeing Will transform into the lethal warrior Hannibal had only glimpsed through the crooked stitching of Will's mild-mannered person suit had given Hannibal a new understanding and appreciation for the beast that dwelt in Will's breast. During the Minnesota Shrike case, Hannibal had arrived too late to witness Will gun down Garrett Jacobs Hobbs, and had assumed Will had hemmed and hawed his way through it like he did through most of his decisions. But now, having witnessed the execution of Michelle Hendrix, Hannibal had been forced to rethink his position on guns and Will in general. In the moment before the trigger was pulled, Hannibal had felt a pure and ruthless energy uncoil inside Will causing him to appear less like a mongoose and more like a cobra.

The kill itself was quick and clean, but Will's transition back into himself was slower and more liquid. Wrapped around Will's body as he had been, Hannibal was present for every wave of those changes as Will's nerves reconnected and his values returned. It was a remarkable thing to experience secondhand and more intimate than Hannibal would have thought possible given the instrument involved in the killing. At the very least, getting Will to kill again with a gun and the protection of his badge would certainly be easier, and now, Hannibal knew it could be quite enjoyable too!

He picked up Will's hand and gently turned it over so he could inspect his palm and fingertips. They were thickly calloused and lightly scarred by oddly shaped puncture marks which Hannibal assumed were made either fish hooks or dog bites. They were the rough hands of a killer and yet capable of a surprisingly gentle touch. He raised Will's fingers to his lips and kissed the tips, grimacing when he pulled away. '*He still tastes like fish,'* Hannibal thought with a deep set frown, *even after all the washing. Fish and gun oil, how awful.* Why was it always something? If God bore Hannibal any grudge for his good works on Earth, he or she had a truly obnoxious way of showing it.

Will had been nearly catatonic after the shot. He spoke not a word nor did his breathing change from the shallow steady cadence of a man resolved in action and accomplishment as Hannibal brought him below to clean up. He made Will strip down to the waist, and washed what gore he could from Will's body before tucking him into his own bed. He had not intended to climb in after him; Will's bed sheets being generally filthy and pungent as a result of his mysterious night sweats, but then Will grabbed him by the leg, right behind his knee, and silently refused to let go. Hannibal then removed his own shirt, which was similarly over-ripe and covered in fish guts, and tossed it into the next room. When it was clear that he intended to stay, Will released him, scooted closer to the wall to make room and closed his eyes. He was asleep almost as soon as Hannibal had laid down and put his arms around him. Still groggy from the sedative, Hannibal had expected to follow Will into sleep, but with Will at last in his embrace and so soft and pliable too, Hannibal couldn't keep his eyes closed or his hands off him.

He tucked Will's hand against his chest and moved next to play with his curls and remove any fish scales he found. Every movement had to be soft and light lest the over stimulation wake Will, which was delightful in its own way. Hannibal had not had the motive or opportunity to be soft towards anyone since parting from his Aunt Murasaki.

"Every day could be like this," he whispered and kissed the top of Will's head, forgetting again about the fish guts. "Every day if you let it, Will," he said as he wiped his mouth with

the back of his hand.

But would Will allow it if he knew *all* of Hannibal's secrets? Doubtful as things looked now, Hannibal didn't think the day was very far off when Will might decide differently. Hannibal had proved to himself that he could make Will take a life under the right set of conditions and observed Will reveling in his own darkness during his episodes of unconsciousness, but until both things occurred at the same time and place, Hannibal knew he must keep his true desires hidden.

Will's heartbeat began to quicken as he roused from heavy slumber, so Hannibal closed his eyes and adopted the posture of a dreamer while he waited for Will to wake on his own. He felt Will's body buck the minute he opened his eyes, surprised who he was waking up beside, as Hannibal "slumbered" on with one arm draped across Will's chest.

"Hannibal?" Will asked meekly. "Are you awake?"

Hannibal made a grouchy face and pulled Will closer still pretending to sleep. Will bucked again, and this time accidentally kneed Hannibal in the groin. Hannibal moaned and released his tight hold allowing Will to roll slightly away. He couldn't go very far trapped as he was between Hannibal's body and the bulkhead.

"Sorry! I'm sorry! You startled me. Oh geez, are you okay?"

Hannibal adjusted himself and shook off any remaining traces of annoyance lest he ruin the mood by appearing sour. "Alive and well. How are you?"

"Michelle?"

"Dead. Do you not remember?" Hannibal asked in genuine alarm. This trip would be all for naught if Will did not remember the final fight.

"I remember. I was hoping it was another nightmare." Will said hiding his guilt by avoiding eye contact.

Hannibal placed his hand on Will's hip and stroked the bare skin above the waistline of his shorts with his thumb. "You saved us, Will, and killed a serial killer. You have nothing to feel remorseful for."

Will's eyes darted to Hannibal's hand. "A serial killer who you slept with may I remind you."

It was a good jab, but performative. It lacked the subtle sour flavor of Will's everyday malice; however, the normality of their standard banter allowed Will to take control back from the other hungers of his heart, which Hannibal sensed he needed right now. So despite his many feelings on the matter of Michelle Hendrix, Hannibal forced himself to endure the gentle chiding and attack on his good taste.

"Yes...well, no one is perfect, myself included." It was still profoundly galling to have been duped so completely by that Jezebel. He should have known she was up to something. He should have! *'Enjoying yourself, Hannibal? It's almost like you* ***want*** *to be eaten alive,'* he

recalled her saying while they lay in bed together, before she had raked him over with her teeth. *'I can do that for you, you know.'* Hrmph! What nerve! It was far less enjoyable being on the other side of a veiled confession.

"How are you feeling?" Will asked mistaking Hannibal's annoyance for melancholy.

"Isn't that my line?" he joked, but Will did not smile back.

"I killed her, Hannibal, a woman you were fond of even if she did try to kill you later. I killed her and I...I enjoyed it. How can you stand to be like this with me?"

"Be like what?"

"Stop teasing me."

Hannibal inched closer and slid his hand up Will's back. "Be like what, Will?"

Will swallowed and tucked his arms beneath his head perhaps to keep himself from reaching back. "To be intimate. You know what I am. You have to know by now."

"I know *who* you are," he corrected, "and it is enough. I couldn't even begin to explain why that is so, with your self-worth being what it is right now. But one day, Will, I hope you can look into the mirror and see even half the man I do."

"God...that was...terrible. Really, the worst pick-up line ever."

Will was a lean cut of meat, but Hannibal still found a pound of flesh to pinch in retaliation.

"Charming. Listen, Will, when we get back to Baltimore, there is a friend of mine I want you to see. He is a neurologist; Doctor Sutcliffe. I think he might be able to help you.

The light of hope sparked to life in Will's eyes "Wait, you mean there's a possibility what's wrong with me is not mental illness?"

"No, it is definitely mental illness, but your fevers concern me. I'd like to be sure that you are physically whole and well before we tackle the rest of your issues in therapy," Hannibal said. Besides, he had other means now to bind Will to him that would be much more pleasurable than letting this illness run its course. It was risky of course, but Hannibal had decided that he could no longer sit back and watch Will suffer. He had become too dear and too valuable. Sick as he was, Will had seen what Hannibal had not, even if Will hadn't realized WHAT he had seen. Will had always hated Michelle for reasons which had not ever been clear to Hannibal. Then there was Will's gut instinct that the shark had been female—right gender, wrong killer—and he had done all of this while suffering from this strange malady that was burning him up from the inside out. Yet once healed, Will would become stronger, much stronger than he was now, and soon able to see past Hannibal's illusions in due time.

"Oh," Will said with a disappointed sigh punctuating his sentence.

"It will be okay, Will," Hannibal said and genuinely wished he could believe it himself. How soon would Will's mind begin to gather the breadcrumbs which would lead him to Hannibal's

dinner table in one form or another? And be it as a guest or an entree, Will would come. Hannibal had no doubts about that. He was too sharp and smart to turn away from the evidence forever if his mind was not dulled by the constant pain of his illness. But God, grant him permission to keep Will by his side. Will's instincts and uncommon insight would make him the choicest ally and companion. There were no limits to the the chaos they could sow together.

"Where are we?"

"Still anchored. I have not had the chance to look for the spare keys."

"Just radio the Coast Guard for a tow. We shouldn't be moving things around. This is a crime scene now."

Hannibal threaded one leg through Will's and propped himself up onto one elbow. "I'm happy to leave things exactly where they are."

"Um, but...WE should probably move around a little." Will was blushing as he spoke, all too aware of *what* was pressed against his leg.

"Ohhhh?" Hannibal said with a predatory smirk. He rubbed the part of Will's back where he had pinched him and intermittently dragged his fingernail across the tender flesh suggestively. "I like the sound of that too."

"I didn't mean it like that!".

"Didn't you now?" Hannibal chuckled and raised his knee slowly until he felt Will's own erection against his thigh.

Will's cock jerked with interest but he maintained the party line. "We should call the Coast Guard. Let's go, Hannibal."

"Indeed we shall, but there is one thing I'd like to do first if you will consent to it." Hannibal rolled fully on top of Will, and nudged his legs open until their bodies fit comfortably together.

"Hannibal?"

"Will, I would like to kiss you if I may. That is all. Is that okay?"

Will stared up at a place on the ceiling over Hannibal's right shoulder, eyes wide with indecision even as the rest of his body strained for the intimacy that was on offer. "Okay," Will said at last and finally looked Hannibal in the eyes. His face looked so kind and innocent that Hannibal's first instinct was to crush him, smash their lips together and overwhelm Will with his ardour. But through Will's thick eyelashes, Hannibal saw dorsal fins swimming through the shadows of those cool irises warning him to caution. Appearances aside, Will was a monster like him, with a mind as dangerous as it was beautiful and burdened by virtue. If he knew Hannibal as Hannibal wished him to, Hannibal had no doubt he'd be next in line to be fed to the sharks. He needed to be cautious.

Hannibal picked up Will’s right hand and placed it on his own hip, conscious that Will would do well to be given the illusion of control. Then he threaded his fingers through Will’s other hand and pinned his arm to the mattress above Will’s head; all things being equal. He was coy in his advance and placed a line of gentle kisses along Will’s jawline before making his move. Will’s lips were chapped so Hannibal dragged his tongue across them to moisten them before kissing him...again... *and again*, soft and slow. Hannibal thought it was going rather well, but it suddenly got quite out of hand.

He had only a moment's warning before it happened, a tightening of Will’s hand on his hip, then Will surged up, mouth parted, and pressed back with startling need. As before, Hannibal thought he smelled the faint trace of ozone in the air beneath the smell of rotten tuna, but maybe it was only his imagination. Or maybe that's just who Will was, a storm on calm seas, both nimble and deadly.

He gripped Will’s hand tighter and pressed his full weight down on top of him to make him lie still. Will responded to this show of force by lowering his hand on Hannibal's hip and latching onto Hannibal's ass like a feral cat.

A sharp and surprising pain against his bottom lip caused Hannibal to gasp. He pulled back, releasing Will's hand so he could hold himself aloft and parse what had just happened. Will lay beneath him, his pupils blown wide with lust. A small red stain adorned the corner of his mouth, which Hannibal did not immediately recognize as his own blood.

“I remembered you liked teeth, Doctor Lecter,” Will said, chest heaving, with the same tone and timber he’d used to dispatch Michelle.

Hannibal stared at him, mouth agape, then he began to laugh. So much for subtlety. “Oh, my dear Will, you have no idea what you have just done.”

Will reached up and brushed the fringe of Hannibal’s bangs away from his face, then he laid his palm against the back of Hannibal’s neck. “Show me.”

*‘In due time,’* Hannibal thought as he brought their mouths together once more. He did not restrain himself as before, and Will matched him in aggression. Soon it was not just their mouths that were engaged. They rolled their hips against each other as the boat bobbed up and down on the ocean, every thrust building towards the unspoken event that would make them nigh inseparable.

Finally, Hannibal could stand it no more. He reached down between their legs and sloppily began tearing at belts and buttons.

“Hannibal,” Will said hoarsely and shivered when Hannibal wrapped his hand around his dick and freed it from his shorts. “I'm not ready for sex.”

Of course, Will was not ready for sex. During their brief conversation about his sexuality, Hannibal had ascertained that Will would require a strong emotional bond to his partner before sex was on the table. As of now, their emotional connection was incomplete by design and circumstance and too new to allow for the consummation of their relationship. Nevertheless, there were other things they could do to strengthen the connection and certain

truths that would not endanger the fictitious life of Dr. Hannibal Lecter M. D. “Don't be ridiculous. When I take you to bed it will be at a five-star hotel after I've wined and dined you on a spread that costs more than a week’s paycheck. This is a practicality. Neither one of us is in any fit state to receive guests when the Coast Guard arrives. Now, lie still, and enjoy it.” Hannibal ordered as he fussed with his bangs, which Will had parted to the wrong side.

“Nothing more?” Will laughed. “You fidgeted.”

“Hush, you.”

“Mmmm,” Will moaned impertinently, his eyes closed and mouth smiling.

Well, that would not do. “Will, look at me.”

Will blinked several times before forcing his eyes forward. The blue of his eyes was nearly swallowed whole by the pupil.

“Now, hold onto me,” Hannibal instructed, and Will obeyed by grabbing him by the shoulders.

“How’s that?”

“Perfect,” Hannibal groaned enjoying the slight pull of gravity that Will’s weight placed on his body. It made him feel like he was falling as they raced towards their climaxes, falling together into the salt sea.

When Will’s head rolled to the side or his eyes closed dreamily, Hannibal got his attention again with soft-spoken entreaties. Will being who and what he was, soon began to analyze Hannibal with that brilliant mind of his. He couldn’t help himself when forced to maintain direct eye contact for so long; his empathy being as natural a process to him as breathing. And the longer Will looked, the more clear one important truth became.

“You...care that much?” Will said in a hushed and nearly reverent voice.

“Yes,” Hannibal hissed raggedly and wished he could have made his voice gentler, but he was beyond that now. While Hannibal could not give Will everything in his heart, including the truth of his authentic self, he could give Will this and hope that this moment of honesty would be remembered and help win back the trust Hannibal would lose on the day of his inevitable betrayal.

“Me too,” Will offered in return.

Scholarly as Hannibal e was, it took only those two monosyllabic words to undo the mighty Chesapeake Ripper, slayer of men. Hannibal came and Will followed him shortly over that edge. They rocked against each other through the aftershocks until they were both thoroughly spent. Hannibal wiped his hand clean smearing their semen across Will’s chest and grimaced at so obvious a mistake. It was another tell, a marking behavior resulting from his possessive nature, but one he already knew about; unlike the fidgeting. Ordinarily, he made efforts to control the catlike and compulsive behavior by expressing it through his fashion and home

decor.  But right now, Hannibal was too tired to reign in his coarser habits, since unlike Will, he had not had the luxury of a nap earlier.

“Gross,” Will complained.

“We smell like day-old sushi, Will, I hardly think it could be worse,” Hannibal said as he stretched out on top of Will and nuzzled at his neck. He still smelled of fish, but also of each other, and enough that Hannibal thought maybe he could sleep now.

One day when Will was healthy and whole would he remember this slip? Would it and all the other small mistakes Hannibal had made finally come together in his mind when it was not inflamed with fever? And most importantly, would he confront Hannibal alone with that dreaded knowledge or would he bring the Cavalry with him? Hannibal felt a momentary pang of regret that he could not be a softer man for Will since it was that harmless and well-mannered dandy he pretended to be, whom he thought Will might be falling in love with. But if he were just a doctor and Will were just a teacher, would they have found such a powerful connection within each other? Probably not. Blood and bone bound them together on this collision course, and blood and bone would either unite them or destroy them. There could be no compromise in this deadly game.

“Hannibal?”

*‘Please, please, please, let me have him.’* Hannibal asked again of whatever higher power felt willing to grant him his heart’s desire. He had only once wanted anything as much as he wanted Will Graham, and as such, he was not sure how to cope with that uncertain future before them. “Please, Will, rest a moment longer. I find myself unwilling to get up right now”

“Unwilling or unable, old man?”

Hannibal bit Will on the shoulder, hard.

“Ouch! Stop that or I’m gonna start calling you Hannibal the Cannibal.” Will scolded and smacked him on the head.

Internally, Hannibal howled with laughter. Charming, beautiful, and funny, Will was everything a man could ask for and so much. *‘It looks like we both caught our maneaters in the end, my love.”*

Chapter End Notes

*"If God bore Hannibal any grudge for his good works on Earth, he or she had a truly obnoxious way of showing it"* Go fuck yourself, Hannibal.

Welp, that's it folks! Again, thank you so much for coming along with me on this little fishing trip. Here's the link to the final tumblr and twitter posts should you feel inclined to boost the signal.

I am also hosting a giveaway on Tumblr, which you can view here.

What's next for me? Well, I am writing a Tristhad Star Wars AU right now; editing a belated birthday present for @cannibalhouse that is definitely not tentacle porn (or so she thinks); outlining the next installment in the epic fantasy series Some Other Worlds. But the main event kicks off this October with Remember the Ravenstags, my hannigram American football AU. ;-) And I know that sounds weird, but I bet it wasn't long ago that you were thinking "Um, Jaws? Really? No one asked for this life." So if you enjoyed Maneater, I hope you'll subscribe for updates from me. So long and thanks for all the fish, my friends!

With love,

- Red

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